

# ARGOSY

and Railroad Man's Magazine

Issued Weekly

## SWORD AND ANVIL

*by George Foxhall*



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A YEAR.





***The only way  
you can discharge an  
Iver Johnson is to pull  
the trigger all the way back***

You often read of tragedies caused by the accidental discharge of revolvers. Perhaps this is why you haven't a revolver in your home.

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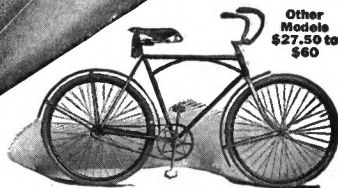
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Johnson  
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Roadster  
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(A)



# ARGOSY

## AND RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

Vol. CVIII

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 2

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THE SALVATION ARMY HOME SERVICE FUND  
MAY 19 TO 26





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a CARAT**

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**1/4 Carat \$10.00  
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**\$100.00 Forfeit Guarantee**

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33 State Street Catalog Dept. 23 Detroit, Michigan

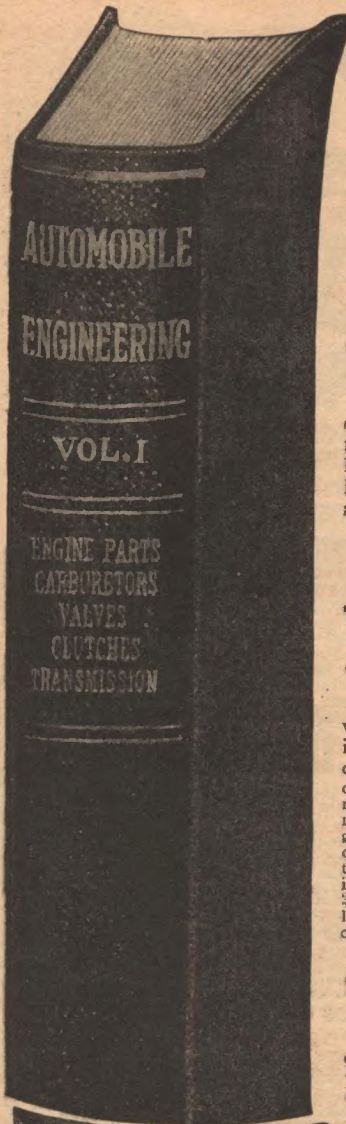
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Send me, without obligation, Catalog of **LIBERTY GEMS**—**FREE** Test offer—introductory direct prices; and Easy Terms.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_





NAME	POSITION	SALARY
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SATURDAY, MAY 24, 1919

No. 2



# Sword and Anvil

## by George Foxhall

Author of "Genius of Victory," "McPhee's Sensational Rest," etc.

### CHAPTER I.

No awe the eyes of recreant king can give  
When on a true man's vengeful sword they  
look;

No more of majesty in him doth live  
Than in a squirming worm upon a hook.

—THE BALANCE.

LORD WINSTON rode a questing. Outlawed he was, and fugitive, but by his side a blade that no single blade in England would dispute, between his knees his great black charger, Queen, and in his breast the blithesomeness of a great spirit.

For you shall find here, in Rupert, Earl of Winston, a man of such rare chemistry as could scarce then be found in that tyrant and evil-ridden land; a mighty fighter, a poet, whose heart sang of rich beauty, a gentle knight whose knightly vows dwelt like the whisper of ordination within him, protecting the weak, reverencing the chaste, and meeting the grim and vicious snarls of licentious tyranny with laughing contempt, content to make his sword the warden of his life.

To him the ancient chivalry was a living symbolism of high virtues, vitalized by a touch of the intellectual spirit that was soon to sweep England into "the specious days

of Queen Elizabeth." The last of the great knights was he, or the first and premature arrived of those great English gentlemen whose brightest stars were Raleigh, Drake, Frobisher, Grenville, Howard, Sydney, and half a score of others.

Once before had Lord Winston ridden upon this quest and gone back to France with the quest unfulfilled. Fearlessly and openly he had ridden, for even Henry the Eighth, who seemed to fear nothing on earth, including the Pope, knew better than to kill or imprison the chief of the great Brotherhood of Swords, though outlaw him he might without appeal or vengeance, confiscating his lands and sending him — or allowing him to go — into exile.

For Winston, in defense of his orphaned sister's honor, had held King Henry where no other human being had ever held him in earnest, at the point of his sword in the maid's own chamber, when the king was a guest in his own house.

"A blot upon fair knighthood and common human decency, art thou, Sir King," he had told him, "and a stain upon the throne of England which a thousand years shall not wipe out. Recreant knight and false king, art thou, and I do, hereby, for-



swear my allegiance to thee, demanding in the name of the Brotherhood of Swords, the right to depart unhindered and unhurt from thy dominions with my sister and all my goods not held in fief from thee. Here shalt thou write it, declaring all future writings gainsaying it void and false, and seal it with thy signet, which I will keep until I board ship. Else, by God's light, thou diest now."

King Henry, known as Bluff King Hal, probably because he had almost everybody bluffed into believing that he wasn't such a bad fellow after all, in spite of his little weakness for burning people and chopping off their heads, and being in every other way about the most contemptible ruffian that ever ruled in England—King Henry, though he was the color of a dead skate for a while, tried a little bluffing on Lord Winston, who, in the language of our own day, couldn't be bluffed, because that shining steel ace he held was better than any lone king in the deck, and he knew better than to give it up.

"Thou art a man after mine own heart, Winston," said the king. "Happy is the king who has even one subject so fearless and honest. Put up thy sword. Thou hast nothing to fear from me." At which Lord Winston chuckled deeply.

"I fear you not, Sir King," he said. "An you are wise, however, you will fear me, for never yet has Winston broken his word to friend or foe. Write!"

"If thou would'st leave England, thou need'st not our royal passport. On the word of a king, I will hinder thee not. Thou shalt go scatheless or stay scatheless."

"Scatheless I will go, I and mine. Write, and seal! There are the tools."

"Dost flout our kingly word?"

"Not I; but I will e'en have it written down. You change your kingly mind too easily, and I would save your life, for the day you change your mind on this is your last day on earth."

"I am unused to threats."

"The more beware of them. I am no man to threaten idly. He who threatens a king must make it good or die."

"By my crown, thou art a man, Lord Winston, fearless and upright, and I have

too few such and, mayhap, deserve as few. I will write; not for thy threatening sword, nor for the Brotherhood of Swords, but because thy strong humor pleaseth me. As for the maid, thy sister, the Lady Gertrude, give her the king's most humble duty, and sue her for me her most gracious pardon."

"A very pretty story," thought Winston, "for the believing of which I should soon figure in another pretty story, which would lead to the loss of my head, an he dared, and at least my banishment in poverty."

The king wrote. Winston read. The king sealed the document with the ring from his finger. Winston took the ring. The king laughed with well affected good nature.

"Safely return to England whene'er thou wilt, Lord Winston," he said. "Thy lands shall be secure. I am not a man to bear a grudge long."

"So I have perceived, sir; which same brevity keeps the headsman busy. But remember well what was conveyed to you when five thousand swordsmen, nobles, knights, and gentlemen, banded themselves into the Brotherhood of Swords, because your head-choppings and your love affairs were too numerous. Not one of us may die except after trial by our own sworn judges, and none of us may be tried for defending the honor of our women. Well do I know your skill in finding other causes for which I might not make cause with the Brotherhood of the Sword, and for that reason will I hie me to France."

"And serve Francis I?"

"An he will take my service."

"The most trenchant blade in Europe! Doubt not Francis for that!" exclaimed King Henry bitterly.

"Your majesty e'en put so slight a value on my sword as to offer most deadly insult and dishonor to my house and fame."

"Francis is no saint," sneered Henry.

"Nor is he dastard."

"Thou speak'st thy king most vilely."

"No king of mine, who acts in mine house the ruffian and prowling thief of virtue. Go to! Thou'rt but an o'erswollen and coarse lump of vice, and I, true knight to all my vows, do esteem thee less than my groom, who, bound by no vows, doth yet live decently."



"Thou wagg'st a rude tongue behind thy naked sword," growled the king. "Yet will I suffer thee thine honesty and prove myself thy king by large forgiveness. Hold'st thou still thy purpose to go to France?"

"I hold it. And now I will conduct you to your chamber, sir, and by God's light, if you leave it again this night you die."

Kings are supposed to become very dignified and majestic when mere subjects use such language to them, but cold steel is a great equalizer, and as for majesty, the vicious and self-indulgent king was but an ill-bred booby compared with the magnificent athlete and polished gentleman who lashed him with such fearless contempt, yet withal as coolly and lightly as if the king had been but a village churl.

Although but twenty-five, and as yet not fully risen to the great fame that he was soon to achieve in grim warfare under the banners of Francis, Lord Winston had already acquired a fame second to none in the knightly games and sporadic troubles of the time, while as a swordsman, the finished use of which weapon was now becoming developed to an art, he was even then widely acknowledged a master without peer in England, a reputation which had gained for him, together with his well known chivalrous and gallant character, the leadership of the Brotherhood of Swords.

For, in those days, few men were trusted. The gallows, the block, and the slow fires of Smithfield were devourers of trust and friendship. The friends of the king were no safer than his enemies; the enemies of the Pope no safer than his friends; the Queen of England no safer than the maid of Kent. A whim, a lust, a passion, and the strongest friendship led, like the bitterest enmity, to the Tower or the fire.

So, came the Brotherhood of Swords, and that gave the king's temper something to ponder over, for in it were his closest friends, his best soldiers, gentlemen of his guard and gentlemen of his household, as well as men on whom his ripe resentment was ready to fall. It was a purely defensive society, allowing none of its members to begin a quarrel against the king, and offering them no protection except when

defending their lives or honor, especially—such was the evil repute of the monarch—the honor of their women.

## CHAPTER II.

A tongue that e'er, by what it said  
And what it said not, boasted lies.

—THE RECREANT.

SIR JOHN TORREY was bragging about his swordsmanship and his sword and his shrewdness and his favor with the king and his success with ladies and the still unaccomplished prowess he was about to exhibit at the coming tournament. In short, Sir John was bragging about everything that he could think of or anybody else suggest, including his unearthly ugliness, for which he was almost as famous as for his villainy.

Boasting is one of the most entertaining of occupations, but it needs a sense of humor. It should be done with a laugh and received with a smile. Sir John sneered or scowled when he boasted; the sign of a cur. Sir John was a cur. Also, he was less than half sober. Otherwise, he wouldn't even have boasted, being too sullen and ungracious even for that.

It was in the Red Lion Inn at Tadcaster. Dozens of knights and noblemen were on their way to the military fête that was to be held next day outside of York. It was expected that the king would be there. Some said he might run a course, but others scoffed at the idea and said the king's days in armor were over.

The best room of the inn had been thrown open as a general room for the distinguished guests, in which they could foregather before they went to their beds. In an ingle nook some four or five quiet but convivial gentlemen were gathered around a small table, paying little attention to Sir John and his noisier group, and skilfully parrying the attempts to include them or to be included by them which he made.

It was this led Sir John to more wine and more noise and the loud retailing of stories of intimacy between himself and the king, who, it appeared, invariably addressed him as "Jack."



"They say the king will give a jeweled sword, made by Elizabeth the Sword-Maker, to the best swordsman at the tournament," said a tall, thin knight, Sir Walton Carr, from Lancashire. "Who, think ye, will win it?"

Torrey laughed his ill-bred, mirthless sneer. "Win it! Go to, man! 'Tis already won. I saw the sword in the king's own chamber. 'Tis a way I have discovered of making you a present, Jack," said his majesty to me, 'for an you cannot win it from that rabble of clumsy north country swingers of old iron, I will ne'er speak to you again!'"

"The king," said a quiet, scornful voice, breaking the dead silence that brooded for an instant over this insult, "was seeking a certain excuse for never speaking to you again; not for giving you a present."

The speaker was one of the group at the table in the ingle-nook, a ruddy, clean-complexioned man of solid build, with cold, blue eyes and strong, handsome face.

"He must then, have known that others than you would enter the contest, my lord," snarled Torrey.

"By my faith, I think thou art wrong, Rossford," laughed another of the group, a great, blond giant. "Methinks the king was but trying to forestall the stealing of the sword."

"They say," put in Sir Walton Carr, who seemed to feel it a duty to get Sir John both into trouble and out of it, "they say this Elizabeth is the most beauteous maid in Christendom. Have you seen her, Sir John?"

"The ugliest hag that e'er escaped the stake," laughed Sir John, by no means unwilling to ignore the blond giant's insult. "Now, as for beauty, there is a maid hard by my Yorkshire estate who transcends all maids in England."

"Ye would make a pretty pair," suggested one of the north country knights; at which there was a general laugh.

"I have already decided on't," said he.

"When you have won the sword. Methinks it 'll be just as easy." The north country knight leaned toward satire. "I pray you bid us to the wedding. I am a lover of contrasts."

"I said naught of weddings. The maid is an artisan's daughter."

Somebody tried a laugh, but these were for the most part men of an unwritten but inviolable code. No true gentleman would harm a daughter of the lower and weaker social order. The laugh cackled to a swift and eloquent silence. Men stirred uneasily.

"How came this fellow in here," drawled the blond nobleman to his companions, "with his brag of swords and maids? Methinks he should consort with the sutlers. When Winston sat amongst us, we tolerated none such. Even churls were knightly seeming when Winston was about."

"The truest knight of us all, by St. George," said Lord Rossford. "An he were here we should hear little talk of swords from this same Torrey."

This was being spoken in a tone that did not quite carry to Torrey, who, catching the name of Winston here and there, stood watching the group with an extravagant sneer, for he was Winston's bitter enemy. Rossford rose to his feet and now spoke in a louder tone, addressing the entire gathering. He lifted his wine cup.

"Gentlemen all, on the eve of a gallant tourney I give you a toast. We need something to remind us of our ancient chivalry. I broach you the most gentle knight, the finest swordsman, the greatest warrior, the stanchest friend, the most dreaded enemy in Europe; the very knight of knights, whose vows are incense offered to the saints; whose sword is a flame around the head of innocence; the virgin-hearted and mighty; the great chief of the great Brotherhood of Swords, Rupert, Earl of Winston."

A score of men were on their feet at once, wine cups and tankards held high.

"Winston!" they shouted. "May he soon return! Remember ye," said one, "that little deep-born laugh." "Aye, marry! Like a caress of death it was." "I heard it once in Flanders. My horse was down and a bull of a Bavarian mercenary was over me with an ax. And then I heard that short, deep laugh and the great German bull was a ghost. Saw you ever so joyous a fighter?"

Torrey had taken no part in this im-



promptu toast, but stood sneering and grimacing amongst a circle of his cronies.

"Methinks these be all clacking women," said he to one of them. "What is all this chatter about innocence and virgins and the half-mad Winston?"

"They say," said the unfailing Sir Walton, "that Sir John outgeneraled Winston at least once, having secured his lands and manors through a shrewd trick of generalship since he hied him to France."

"I recovered in open court for certain moneys justly owed to me," snarled Sir John.

"And I testified," put in Lord Rossford, "that the papers you showed were none of Winston's writing, as could be proved easily enough. The court awarded you the case ne'ertheless, and sustained your lying charges of treason and declared Winston outlaw."

"Why went he so suddenly to France?" asked Sir Walton.

"In defence of that same innocence we heard of," scoffed Torrey. "The king's innocence, methinks it was, for Winston's sister, having sought in vain the high honor of being the king's—"

A pewter tankard, missing its mark by a little, struck him on the chest, while a raging madman leaped across the room, pushing men to right and left as he came.

"Foul, filthy, recreant liar!" shouted Lord Rossford, standing before him. "I say thou didst try to trap an innocent maid who had rebuffed thee into more powerful entanglements than thine, and that then thou didst shamefully rob and despoil Lord Winston. Of the king or the king's justice I do say nothing, for I am his liege subject, but of thee I say thou art dastard and recreant and a disgrace to true knighthood, and this to support it."

And he suddenly let fly with his clenched fist and smashed Sir John hard across the mouth, sending him reeling. Like a flame of light Sir John's sword flashed out and he leaped forward, spitting blood through his cut lips. He would have run Rossford through before the nobleman could have drawn but that half a dozen men rushed between, some seizing him and holding him back, all talking at once.

Sir John whirled his great shoulders twice with vicious strength, and men were flung aside so that he had room to move his sword.

"By St. Michael! Shall I *cut* my way to him?" he shouted. "Rossford, this night is thy last."

Rossford, no less infuriated and no less willing, had drawn his sword and was pushing men aside, when the great blond nobleman, to be called here the Duke of Mayforth, laid a hand on his shoulder and drew him back. Rossford turned and looked with eyes of deadly purpose into his friend's face.

"Mayforth," said he, "stay me not. If that foul lie should go one night uncleansed it would taint my soul forever. The Lady Gertrude is my promised wife. This night he or I stand at the door of death."

"I would not hinder thee, man," said the duke, "but it shall be done by proper form and rule—for this reptile is no free foe for a gentleman—the which, if thou dost fail to keep, Sir John, I will e'en brain thee with a stool. Pick thee a friend, if thou hast one, to make with me the rules of the fight. Some of you, gentlemen, be good enough to clear the floor."

Sir Walton Carr and the duke drew up the rules, which were simple enough and made to cover the slenderness of equipment and the confined space. If a man slipped he was to be unmolested, as also if he fell over furniture, or the person of a spectator, or was disarmed, or his sword broken, or if he fell of wounds, whether he could or could not rise. Sir John wore a shirt of mail, which he was required to take off, as Lord Rossford wore no defensive armor. They stepped into the center of the room, and at once the fight began.

Swordsmanship, while it had become a fine art of strength, quickness and technical skill, had not been brought to the marvelous perfection of fence in England that was just appearing in the French and Italian schools of arms, but it was indeed a most vicious and terrible exercise.

Sir John Torrey's boast of swordsmanship was no vain one. His short figure, with huge breadth of shoulders, looked less athletic than the tall and well-knit form of his antagonist, but his long arms and large



shoulders argued a terrible strength, and he went to his work with the fury of a sudden gale.

The first clash of steel drove the mists of blind hatred from Rossford's eyes. He became a cool, agile fighting machine, parrying the hurricane of blows with swift, sure skill, stepping easily here and there. For a minute it seemed as if he must be content to guard, until the fury of Sir John's onslaught should spend itself, but in the very heat of it suddenly his blade shot forward like a serpent's tongue in a lightning *join in carte*. Sir John's parry and quick backward leap were a fraction of an instant late, and a trickle of blood down the left side of his throat showed where the steel had bit.

"Winston would have killed thee then," said Rossford.

"To hell with Winston!" snarled Torrey, and feinted a slashing cut for the shoulder which he dexterously twisted into a thrust in pierce, gashing deep along the ribs under Rossford's sword arm.

The breath of both men was now coming in panting gasps. Rossford's doublet crimsoned with a great, spreading stain. He whirled to the attack as if with double strength and speed, driving and thrusting with imperious, swift-flung blade, smashing here and there with blows that made Torrey's great wrist quiver as it parried.

But Torrey was no novice. He knew that this rushing storm of steel had a significance to his advantage. He knew he had bitten deep and that life-blood was flowing from Rossford's side, and that this was the whirlwind of one who must win quickly or fail.

Yet it seemed as if Rossford's strength was inexhaustible. Around the room he drove his enemy, urgent, not to be denied. Once he slashed his cheek. Once he bit into his thigh. Sir John felt his own hot blood gush, but with iron calculation refused to infringe on that sweeping attack, watching keenly for a sign that it would slacken.

And slacken at last it did, at first imperceptibly and only to be renewed a second later, than more noticeably and for a longer period. And still Sir John made no effort to take the offensive.

Now it became clear to all what the

knight planned. He would wait until Rossford was practically helpless from his great exertions and loss of blood, and then, after refusing to expose himself to the least mischance by attacking, he would run his enemy through when Rossford was too weak to resist or be dangerous.

"Save thyself, Godfrey!" cried Mayforth. "Make him come to thee, man."

Rossford tried to smile with his white, panting lips, but his straining eyes belied it. That brave, ghostly smile told that Rossford knew that unless he got home quickly, the moment Torrey came to him would be his last.

With one last desperate leap he thrust forward at Sir John's breast, slipped, missed, and lurched forward with his breast on Sir John's rigid point. But even as he fell forward he half recovered, and with a scrambling gesture, as the knight's sword pressed into his breast, he thrust his own weapon deep into his adversary's sword arm and fell, lifeless, in a twisting fall, his own sword still held slackly in his fingers, Sir John's beside him, the blood welling slowly from the wound in his chest, and as he fell, first to one knee and then over on one side, he gasped: "Winston will—finish—"

Sir John stood with heaving chest over his fallen enemy. "Let Winston come," he sneered.

Mayforth and others of Rossford's friends ran forward to the fallen man, and hastily ascertained that, ugly as they were, the wounds had penetrated no really vital spot. Mayforth looked up at the sneering face.

"We will let Winston know," he said. "Do thou abide his coming. Methinks I hear his laugh already as he quenches thee with never a hard-drawn breath. Abide his coming."

"Methinks," said Sir Walton Carr, examining Torrey's wounded arm with considerable satisfaction, "I may yet win the Sword-Maker's sword in to-morrow's tourney. Be she ugly as Sir John himself, it will scarce harm the good steel. You have lost your chance, Sir John."

"Tut!" said Sir John. "There is still the maid."



"And Winston!" put in the north country knight. "Thou hadst better wed the hag and retire into purgatory."

### CHAPTER III.

Swung from his brand a windy buffet out,  
Once, twice, to right, to left, and stunned the  
twain.

—GERAINT AND ENID.

LORD WINSTON, then, untricked by the king's plausible speeches and patronizing offers, had gone to France, and, within two months, he learned that Sir John Torrey had brought into a corrupt court slanderous charges against him, producing forged documents to prove debts of huge sums of money, and the court, though, as a peer of the realm, it had no jurisdiction over him, after giving him *three days* in which to appear to defend himself, declared him outlawed and fugitive and his estates confiscated to his debtor, Sir John Torrey, in payment of his just debt.

On this matter—and indeed it troubled Winston not at all—there was no appeal to the Brotherhood of Swords, for he had left England voluntarily for the service of France, and had not appeared in the court to defend himself, but he was still the leader of the Brotherhood, which had spread, through other exiles, to France, and, as such, his life could not lightly be taken.

For a time he was kept busy by affairs in France. A year had passed. And then Lord Rossford, scarce recovered from his wounds, had gone to France and told him of Torrey's vile slander against his sister, and then Lord Winston rode in quest of Sir John Torrey. In Devonshire, and Kent, and Surrey he rode, but the knight eluded him, and he must needs return to France after killing two men who waylaid him and wounding a third.

A year later he rode once more upon the quest, but this time he had tidings of the knight in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where he had bought him a house, and where, it was said, the knight had boasted was a woundrous maiden, so beautiful, that cold steel glowed to heat in her presence. More than this he would not say, though it was said the king himself was curious.

So Lord Winston rode blithely, for he felt his enemy near. It was an evening in April. The spring was in his blood.

"Cold steel," he said cheerily, thinking of Torrey's boasted maid, "cold steel shall glow and still seem cold as death to thee, Sir Robber and Traducer, when thou look-est on this sword. 'Twas made, said the armorer who sold it to me, by the famous female maker of swords, Elizabeth the Sword-Maker, who, said 'he, is so ugly she frightens the spirit of the devil into the hot steel and thus tempers it perfectly for riving men's souls from their bodies; though, said the antic fellow, he had never seen her, and would not accuse of enchantment one who was called by craftsmen the supreme artist of them all."

Laughing, he whipped the sword from scabbard and twirled it with incredible cunning and speed this way and that around his head and by his sides, behind him and in swishing cuts, until he seemed to be surrounded by a series of continued arcs of lightning in the fast failing light. And as he twirled the blade, he sang in a tuneful barytone voice, a song called "The Song of the Sword."

"These three are one. The hand that wrought,

The hand that wields the lambent death,  
And the sweet sword that, swift as thought,  
Makes vagrant air of living breath,  
These three—are one."

Down the road behind him came a clattering of horses and the silhouettes of four horsemen could be seen for a moment at the top of the hill, melting into a moving blur on the road as they descended. Winston took off his velvet cap and replaced it with a light steel headpiece that protected head and ears and neck. Such a change, on falling into company at night, was a customary enough precaution. Winston made it almost without thinking, continuing his song the while.

"These three are one, the quenching blade,  
Unsuiled honor bravely borne,  
And answering eyes of gentle maid,  
Now—or at resurrection morn,  
These three—are one."

Queen was mincing along at a dainty gait, with sidling prancings to the road-



side as the other horsemen approached. For she was a horse of great wisdom and knew without touch of knee or rein that at night men coming from behind should be observed, unless her master wished, indeed, to keep ahead of them, a feat equally simple.

So she pranced and sidled and half turned, tossing her head the while as if the April air tingled her blood, too, to hope of adventure—as there could be no doubt it did, but then she was like her master; and the air of every other month in the calendar had a precisely similar effect.

Winston, in the mean time, e'en let her prance to please herself while he finished his song, greatly to his own pleasure and admiration, repeating, with rounded flourishes and gay bravado, the last two lines as the men caught up with him.

"Now—or at resurrection morn,  
These three—are one."

The four were evidently retainers or men-at-arms of some knight or petty baron. They wore steel morions on their heads and swords by their sides and were mounted on shaggy, ill-conditioned, and ill-trained animals that seemed more used to the plow or the wain than to the saddle.

One of the men wore, in addition, a single piece of body armor over his leather jerkin, which evidently gave him a greater sense of privilege, for he slackened gait as he approached and stared disapprovingly at the lightly singing nobleman, who seemed unconscious of any audience, though he had missed no detail of the party. Ordinarily, a man-at-arms would have passed a person of quality without speaking, unless addressed, but the song and the night and the deserted road gave license.

"You sing loudly of resurrection morn upon the king's highway, friend," growled the fellow. "'Tis a dull subject to be gay upon."

"The road is narrow, but 'tis long," laughed Winston. "An you like not the song, ride to the end of the road."

"We are enough to ride in what part of the road likes us best, and to keep it free of song-birds that disturb our thoughts."

At this Winston chuckled more deeply.

"Tut, fellow!" said he. "Ride on. I quarrel not with every passing plowman."

At which the fellow's three companions, who had been supporting him but doubtfully, laughed in one great guffaw.

"An we keep not tryst, we are like to have our heads disturbed," said one, "which would trouble me more than the disturbing of my thoughts, so let's on our way, Joe Steeples. The knight hath answered thee fairly."

"First tell me, good fellow," said Winston, addressing the last speaker, "how far lies the house of Sir John Torrey?"

"A good twelve mile, sir, an it please you. The road lies to the left past the little church a mile down. There is a good tavern at the corner, the Green Dragon."

"You are free in guiding nameless night prowlers to Sir John's house, Tom Bedford," said the same discourteous Steeples.

With startling speed and suddenness, and as if of her own will, Queen executed a demi-volte, which brought her flank to flank with the surly Steeples's horse, beside which she now paced queenly, waiting for what should come, alert for lightest touch or lightest word and largely confident in the beloved being who bestrode her.

"Sirrah!" said Winston, speaking softly, "an thou dost speak again I will e'en write my name upon that iron pot of thine."

He laid not hand to sword, nor seemed in any way concerned about the further conduct of the man-at-arms or his companions. Tom Bedford had ridden a little forward, as if unwilling to take part in any quarrel, but the other two, who, truth to tell, were not averse to the rich plunder suggested by Winston's horse and accouterments, pressed about threateningly.

Queen, casting one eye upon her left flank, needed no bidding to tell her that her lord must not be crowded when his voice spake thus. She heaved a mighty shoulder into the ribs of the animal on the other side from Steeples and sent it whirling sidewise. The unfortunate Steeples thought Winston was trying to withdraw, and finding himself with more room, swung his sword forth, shouting:

"Good loot, my masters! At him!"

Then did Queen, answering the cunning



hand and knee, become a black thunder-bolt of speed and intelligence. She gave one little bound ahead, spun suddenly around in her own length, and hurled herself irresistibly forward.

Winston's sword was still in sheath, but in his hand, snatched from his saddle bow, was a small but heavy battle-ax, and as Queen hurled forward, too close upon the unmanageable plow-horse of Steeples for him to have room for his long sword, the ax came down upon the morion and clove it, but so well guided that it but creased the scalp—for Winston killed not churls for sport, and this was scarce serious combat—and as his arm descended his name came laughing from his lips: "A Winston!"

And then, with bound and curvet, like a trained dancer Queen stepped here and there, and with each swift change Winston's arm flew lightly out, smiting with the flat side of his weapon: "A Winston! A Winston!" laughed he, and with each flashing move a man fell senseless from his saddle.

Tom Bedford had turned his horse at the clatter and surveyed the scene.

"If you have slain them, I must e'en attempt you, Sir Knight," said he, "even if you be Winston's self."

"'Sdeath! Thou'rt a man of metal, Tom Bedford," said Winston. "They are not dead, unless they died of surprise, though I spared not to bleed that loud-mouthed churl thou callest Steeples. Let his sore pate teach him manners."

"Are you then in truth, Lord Winston? Or some knight of his?"

"A knight of his, I am, good Tom."

"Then may the saints pray for his enemies when Lord Winston fights if you be but knight of his. They say he is a joyous fighter. For my own part I never saw a fighter more joyous than your knightship's self."

"Whom ride you behind, Tom Bedford?"

"Behind Sir John Torrey."

"I am on my way to his house. Shall I find him there?"

"Likelier there than anywhere, I should say. He was e'en on his way there last time I saw him.

"Which," muttered Tom Bedford, as Winston thanked him and rode on, "which, if I remember right, was this day week. I love not Sir John, who is but a thieving knight at best, but I would e'en collect my pay for this business 'fore that same joyous fighter laugh his knightship's brains out. Then may he meet him where he will and may I see the meeting, for if he be not Winston's self, I am then a fool."

So Lord Winston rode to the house of Sir John Torrey, only to be told by the lodge keeper that Sir John had fared forth, whither, the old man knew not, but that he would some time next day be in the village of Hulcaster, he knew, for one of the old fellow's sons was to meet him there, and would the worshipful knight lodge with him the night, or rest himself and horse an hour or twain? The worshipful knight would not, but thanked him with soft courtesy and went to a near-by inn. And the next morning he rode toward Hulcaster singing:

"And when I lay my lance in rest,  
And when my sword with victory gleams,  
Unseen, thy favor gilds my crest,  
Oh, wondrous lady of my dreams."

#### CHAPTER IV.

A maid of such rare chemistry, she seems  
Now most to please the eye, now most the  
mind.

The richest broidure of a good man's dreams,  
He, in the genius of her soul shall find.

—THE MAID OF MAIDS.

**A**BSALOM WHITE, the smith of Hulcaster, was a famous worker with metal and forge, but he had a daughter of two and twenty summers whose touch upon the white-hot steel was the caress of inspiration, welding the soul and fiber of her genius into the glowing metal until it lived, subtle and supple and slender, and pure as the clean-blown fire. She was a maker of swords. Her name was Elizabeth.

Their forge was not under a spreading chestnut-tree. It was in a secluded part of a stout building, for there were secrets: secret tools, secret methods; but the hidden genius of Elizabeth the Sword-Maker none could copy, not even her father.



She had studied the lore of steel. The master craftsmen of Europe and Asia Minor had wittingly and unwittingly given her priceless secrets, for she had secrets to give in exchange, but the secret of that creating touch none of them could master. She was an artist. With her, anvil, and hammer, and bench, and tools were implements of creation.

There was an inner forge and an outer forge, with a dim storeroom between. In the outer forge Absalom, not being an artist, picked up sundry pence by such humble branches of his trade as the mending of carts and the shoeing of horses. Elizabeth shod no horses, nor mended carts.

She came, one day, from her own workroom, and stood for a moment in the doorway of the shop, dressed in her working clothes, which made her look very little like a young lady artist and very much like a young apprentice. She was happy with the happiness of relaxed nerves, for she had just finished and fitted the blade of blades, the like of which was not in Europe.

She breathed great drafts of the sweet April air, pulling off the leather gloves with which she protected her hands, and spreading her strong but pretty fingers for the cool wind to blow through them.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she said. "'Tis good to be alive, with work accomplished, and the spring whispering its benison. Is it not, father?"

"'Tis ever good to be alive," answered her wise and practical father. "Sometimes 'tis bitter seeming, but did we not sustain our bitterness and press on we should ne'er reach the times when life seems good. 'Tis all a journey, and the end crowns all."

"And what is the end, my father?"

"Nay, child, I know not. But 'tis in the wisdom that gives us courage for the journey."

"Methinks the end also, if there is an end, must be glorified by the journey, father, as the finished blade is made perfect blow by blow and by each cunning heating and cooling, and not by the last blow only."

"Thou art a wise maid. The saints send thee a wise husband, for a dullard will break thy heart."

"I shall e'en help the saints in the

choice," she laughed. "Know you what I shall do, now, father?"

"I never know what thou wilt do, lass. Except," he went on, with smiling pride, "that it will be nothing thy mother would not love to see. What wilt do, Bessie?"

"Nothing! For three long, lazy months I will e'en do not a thing but breathe air, eat food, drink beverage, sleep sleep, dream dreams, and be called by thee and Mistress Turner the laziest maid in Yorkshire."

"Tut, Bessie! Thou'lt grow fat. Thou dost incline thee somewhat to plumpness."

"Oh, I shall walk, and run, and swim, and ride."

"'Tis but what thou dost always do after thy labors, to keep brain and body sound. I thought thou wouldst surprise me."

"Therein I surprised thee."

"And now will I surprise thee. What wouldst think of a journey to Milan?"

"Oh! Above all things, my father. The gild of armorers did somewhat overreach me in the matter of the suit of armor when last we—"

"Regret it not," laughed her father. "Did they not wish thee a great lord to wear it for thee?"

"A prince, methinks!" she admitted, laughing also, "but 'twas a priceless secret I bought it withal, and I doubt if the prince I shall not get, and the armor I did get, glorious though it be, can weigh the value of it."

"Thou'rt true woman; ever regretting thy bargain. They undertook but to wish thee a prince, minx, not to give thee one. Who rides here? Huh! Sir John Torrey."

"The prince of evil," avouched Bessie. "That is no prince to my liking."

"Get thee out of sight. I'd as soon the foul fiend gormandized thy beauty."

Bessie, being of like mind, if not so forcible of expression, had vanished, ere the knight, unaccompanied, rode to the smithy door. The knight was a newcomer of little over a year to the neighborhood. He was accounted a man of great wealth, though parsimonious, and, such was the impression he made upon the countryside, he was reputed variously to be a bandit, a retired sea-pirate, and the devil, the only unanimity being that he was probably all three.



He wore a shirt of light chain mail, greaves, and a steel cap. He rode half into the smithy, without dismounting.

"Where is thy daughter, smith?" he asked in an ugly growl.

"The minx hath e'en betaken herself to Wakefield, Sir John," answered Absalom. "She hath gone to buy frippery, for 'tis in her mind to journey to Milan."

"Alone?"

"Nay! I shall e'en go with her, and her purse affordeth two stout yeomen."

"When will she be back?"

"From Milan? I—"

"From Wakefield?"

"Nay, I cannot tell. She may return to-morrow before compline, or she may remain a week. She is a maid of humors, and hath an aunt in Bishopgate who doth humor her to the top of her bent."

"I will e'en tame her humors."

"Thou?"

"Aye! Hark thee, good Absalom. I would save the maid much trouble."

"Then e'en keep from her path with your tamings, Sir John. She pleaseth me well untamed."

"There are those would do her injury. Let her come into my service and she shall be safe."

"Thy service? An you want anything of her art she shall e'en perform it here, an you can pay the price, and the task pleaseth her. At present she will undertake no commission for three months."

"I want not her art, man, though it pleaseth me that she hath it. I want the maid herself."

"She is not for you, Sir John."

"I seek her honorably—in marriage."

"Seek elsewhere. She is not for you. Your seeking improves too suddenly."

"There is evil intent toward her, man. Only by marrying me can she escape it."

"She would escape it hardly, whatever it may be. She is not a maid to be injured lightly; nor I the man to abide it."

"I have given thee fair warning."

Up to this point Absalom had managed to maintain an air of decent civility and quiet, but now the red blood rushed to his forehead, and his great arms knotted, and his eyes blazed.

"And who the devil art thou with thy warnings, fair or foul? I am an honest Englishman and can protect my daughter from all the ugly scum of court or kennel. Wouldst come forcing an honest maid into a foul marriage, which belike would be no marriage at best? By St. George! An the king's justice grant me not quittance of thee I will e'en show thee what a free-born Englishman can do with his two hands, knight or no knight."

Sir John whipped sword from scabbard. "By crisscross, I am a mind to make crow-bait of thee now, thou fool!" he roared.

What might have happened then it is hard to say had not a diversion been created by Rufus Tyler, Absalom's stout helper, who chose that moment to drag a white-hot iron from the fire and plunge it into a trough of water into which Torrey's horse was trying to nose. Thereafter for a minute the knight had his hands full trying to keep his outraged animal from bolting.

"Listen," he said, when he had subdued the restive beast to something like quiet. "I am for Wakefield. And when next thou seest thy daughter thou shalt wish she were indeed Lady Torrey. And this for thy comfort: every road and port shall be watched. There is more powerful force than mine in wait for her, and I have shown thee the one way from the net."

He put spurs to his horse and galloped off.

"Then will we e'en abide at home, and see who'll rive her from us," said the smith, for he had an Englishman's touching and sometimes misplaced faith in that place of sanctuary. "Get thee to Wakefield and search Bishopgate, and Westgate, and Kirkgate. I will e'en consult with my neighbors."

He turned to his daughter, who had come forth at the departure of the knight.

"Bessie, bide thee close about the place. Rufus, get thee to thy nooning, but first go bid Anthony Bridgman and Simeon Tucker come see me betimes at the Two Swans. Methinks there is law and good English yeomen to back it, that a man's house shall be as safe as a knight's castle. Meanwhile, let Sir John ride to Wakefield." He doffed his leather apron and strode off to the Two Swans.



But Sir John rode not to Wakefield. He had come from there and knew that the maid had not ridden that way. Sir John would lie in wait, and as for the sanctuary of home, Sir John had a weapon more terrible than any the smith dreamed of, foully come by, 'tis true, but based on the abysmal ignorance of the times which made it all but invincible.

He despaired not of getting the maid without showing his own complicity in this—even as her protector from it—and so he waited. But if aught should force his hand he would use the weapon as his own. He rode to the back door of the Two Swans. Inside were half a dozen or more of his men.

## CHAPTER V.

These three are one: the hand that wrought,  
The hand that wields the lambent death,  
And the swift sword that, swift as thought,  
Makes vagrant air of living breath.  
These three are one.

SOUL OF THE SWORD.

ELIZABETH, thinking not of danger, Sir John being gone, and the idea of danger being anyhow but a vague blur in her free life, was standing in the smithy doorway. Around a bend in the road came a man mounted on a big black mare, riding easily. Strangers were uncommon in Hulcaster, for it lies to one side of the main highway.

Suddenly conscious of her boy's clothes, which she wore unconcernedly enough before her neighbors, the maid stepped within the shop and wished her father would come, for her ear had caught the clatter of a loose shoe, and she knew the horseman would stop.

The shod foot left the flinty road and were muffled by the softer ground in front of the smithy. There was a creaking of leather and a rattle of spurs. The man was dismounting.

Elizabeth made a belated dash across the forge and storeroom for her own workshop, which she had not reached when a chuckling voice, rich with deep amusement, caught her and increased her haste.

"Now by my faith," it said, "never saw I such a speedy flight from so light a task.

Come back, young scampling. There is but one hoof to be shod."

The speaker crossed the smithy and store-room and lifted the latch of the farther door, but the door was fast barred. He shouted, but gained no answer.

"Thou'rt a lazy ne'er-do-well, and I would I had the flogging of thee," said he, still laughing good-humoredly, "but as thou wilt not work for thy master I will e'en work for my mare, for we are in some haste."

With which he unbuckled his sword-belt and laid the weapon on a bench with his riding-cloak and hat, covered his slashed doublet with the smith's leather apron, seized a bar of iron and thrust it into the slumbering fire, which he puffed into a white glow with the big bellows. Then he seized the mare's off hind foot and pulled it between his knees.

"Between a lazy knave and a lazy lord," said he, "the knave is the better laggard. Maybe the gentleman is the better blacksmith, Queen. The knave looked overslight. I'll cuff him for slighting thee later, sweetheart."

Soon the forge rang to the music of the beating hammer. The worker became so interested in his task that he forgot everything else.

"You make very free with other people's property, sir," said a sharp voice behind him. "If the horse is no honester come by than the shoe you should e'en keep your sword about your waist."

The stranger finished driving the last nail into the hoof. Then he dropped the foot and stared thoughtfully at the dainty vision in pink and white that had addressed him, for Elizabeth, newly and hastily scrubbed, losing nothing of piquancy for her haste in dressing, was indeed a vision.

She was of medium height and beautifully modeled; not slender, but not too full for grace. Her face had the assured lines of one who has accomplished through deliberate effort and knows as the result of search, yet the tilt of the chin was altogether feminine and alluring, in spite of those keen and questing eyes from which genius flashed forth its oriflamme of the singular and unusual.



"By my faith," said the stranger solemnly, "methinks I would steal a shoe or a horse or an earldom, an I could dream of such beauty for every theft."

"You are as free with your tongue, sir, as with your hands," and, she added, "with your eyes. Is it not still the custom for a gentleman to bow himself into a maid's acquaintance?"

The stranger bowed low instantly, but now the little imp of mischief had sprung again to the corners of his eyes and mouth.

"Troth!" said he. "'Tis so sudden a leap from blacksmith's boy to beautiful damosel that my manners scarce survived the shock. Is there witchcraft in this place?"

Elizabeth's eyes faltered an instant, and she flushed.

"I asked," she said, "by what right you make yourself so free of another man's gear and goods? 'Twould be fair courtesy to wait for their proper owner."

"You waited, fair mistress, neither to shoe my horse nor to say me nay, and being somewhat forthright of temper, and given to helping myself when there appears none to help me—"

"So I observe. What mean you by my waiting not? I am no shoer of horses."

"Then, by my credit, you should e'en leave off the feathers, an you would not be taken for the bird. I have a wondrous gift for eyes, and though I saw them but an instant under the smith's cap I avouch there are no eyes in Christendom to match the two I now scarce endure."

"I trow 'twould take a basilisk to down-gaze you, sir. Methinks, too, I heard you promise me a whipping."

"Nay, I but hoped for the pleasure. By'r Lady, the whipping should be light."

Something in the musing tone and stare brought the blood in a crimson mantle to the girl's cheeks. Her eyes flashed like the cold flame of one of her own swords.

"Your speech, also, is overlight, sir," she snapped angrily.

For an instant the stranger's eyes flashed fire, but were on the same instant subdued, and only two white spots in the deep-brown of his cheek-bones and the ironical twist in his smile showed that he had been hit.

"Your pardon, blacksmith maiden," said he. "I had almost forgotten that gold is not polished upon an anvil. Some day I will teach you the delicate art of knowing when reproof should become insult, and how."

The red in the girl's cheeks turned to white under the stab of his gentle scorn and her own rage. Here was a mode of fence all new to her, and she was helpless before the subtle play of it. It told her in three swift-piercing sentences that all the airs and graces she had picked up in her travels and her associations and flashed upon him as the haughty breeding of a lady were but thin and false gilt that melted under the searing combat she had invited, in which perfect courtesy sheared her rough bludgeon. Steel she might be, but not gold! A blacksmith maiden, but not a lady!

It told her in one perfect sentence that by her play upon his astonishment and her quip about the whipping she had challenged all that his eyes and voice had ventured, and that her reproof should have been spirited, perhaps, but not angry and insulting; that anger and insult there showed the blacksmith maid and not the lady; the steel, tempered and shaped upon the anvil, not the gold, polished with soft care and cunning.

And then the biting stroke of confident authority, patronizing, perfect in politeness yet intolerably presumptuous. "Some day I will teach you—" And some prescience in her woman's heart resented it ragingly while feeling it to be the voice of Fate. It turned her to cold wrath. This time the steel rang true and left no need for gold.

"My father will be here anon," she said, "but you need not wait. I give you the bit of iron and the coal in payment for your instructions. Methinks I have learned all you can teach, and being well paid I pray you go."

"Now by the rood," laughed the stranger, "the instruction hath profited so much I am in mind to claim a kiss as added payment, but I will e'en leave it invested, and when I come again I'll take the payment with interest."

"Oh! I would my father were—"

A shadow blurred the sunlight. A sneering laugh interrupted.

"Lord Winston! La! 'Tis a romantic



interlude in a bloody life, by crisscross!" came a growling voice from the doorway. "The best swordsman in Europe and the greatest sword-maker. Last time I heard of you you had rougher play, my lord. You have no use for a sword in this game, at any rate, so I will e'en hold it myself. You are a thought too eager with it. I have come for the maiden, too, so I fear the rest of your love-play will be brief. I have great need of a swordsmith. Mistress, I have just contracted with thy father for thy services for one year. Gather thy gear together and show my men what tools of thine thou need'st. I am in haste. Get them, varlets."

It was Sir John Torrey. As he spoke he had stepped with swift agility and gained possession of the first visitor's sword. Now he motioned to two men who had been standing just behind him, and they lurched forward, but stopped awkwardly when Lord Winston, still covered by the leather apron and smith's cap, debonair and self-possessed and confident as if clad cap-a-pie in steel and armed with that too eager sword, stood in the way between them and the girl, the laugh of irresistible amusement bubbling in his voice, contemptuous, easily superior.

"By my faith, Sir Bandit," said he, "you hurry me too much. My love-play, as you call it, is but just begun. Consult the broad highway and find you another swordsmith. The maid seems ill-pleased with her father's bargaining, and is, methinks, old enough to do her own. If not, Winston will bargain for her."

"Your bargaining power, my lord, lies in my hand. The bar of iron you toy with is no tool for an artist. Stand aside, or my men shall quench you quick."

"Thy men, gargoyle!" sneered Winston, with unutterable contempt. "I will hear what the maid saith. I knew not she was the Sword-Maker. Methinks so great a lady should devise her own comings and goings."

"'Tis a foul lie about my father," snapped the girl. "What guerdon would he take to sell his daughter to such a reptile, even had he the right?"

"Even the guerdon of heaven, minx," growled Torrey. "I have made honorable offers for thy services this twelvemonth

past, and ye have but 'deviled' and 'rep-tiled' me for my honest pains. Now have I given him his quittance, which I did in defending my life, and do thou—"

"You—have killed him? You have murdered my father? Tell me I hear not in good sense. You have not *slain* him?"

"In fair defense 'gainst his most ruffian attack."

Into the heart of Winston there surged a pity greater even than his ancient hatred of the man before him as he saw the stone-like pallor of the girl and heard the crushed and despairing voice.

"Suffer me a moment," she said. "When I come back I will be ready for your will."

"Five men watch the windows and the other door," Torrey warned her.

"On ~~my~~ word, I will come back this way," she said. "Sir," she begged of Winston, "do you guard my door whilst I say one little prayer for my poor father's soul."

"Every man shall await your behest, lady. Had I but two good friends you should e'en supervise the hanging of these curs ere you went to your most piteous prayers. As 'tis, my life is at your word to hold your will or your revenge 'gainst them whene'er you list."

"Speak them softly, I pray you, sir. You are but one and defenseless, and my only friend. I pray you taunt them not into o'ercoming their fear of you."

"I will e'en abide them silently and they intrude not upon you."

She was gone. At the door upon which Lord Winston had so short a time before thumped good-humored threats against her, he now, unarmed, stood guard o'er her heart-broken prayers, pledging his life that they should be kept inviolate.

"The maid's devotions," sneered Torrey, "protects you for the nonce. When she returns you shall not crow so loud, or I will quench you with your own sword."

The mocking smile once more curved Lord Winston's lips. He stood at the beamed entrance to the storeroom. His horse had sidled up to him there and stood nuzzling his shoulder inquiringly. She was a horse of many battles and scented trouble at the first breath. At Torrey's threat Winston chuckled confidentially to the mare.



"There speaks a warrior, Queen," said he. "With mine own sword will he quench me. And we await his quenching, sweetheart; it must e'en be with our own sword. Hush thee, my beautiful, for we are under command to taunt him not."

"I shall be astride that black beast within the hour," growled Torrey.

"Then will there be more brains under thy nose than above it," retorted the obedient abider in silence. "As for my sword, fellow, when I come to take it do thou move with speed, for men die twixt two eye-winkings when Winston strikes."

"Zounds! No mortal man can move with speed enough to keep pace with Winston's boastings," answered Torrey, not inaptly; at which Winston laughed, for his boasting was as frank as his sword-play swift, and for both he loved to meet a keen defense.

"What trick of law hast worked to make this most foul seizure, for well I know thy tricks of brigandage within the law, and well I know the law of this groaning land, juggled by a lecherous king for his lecherous favorites."

"'Tis all lawful, and so writ—fear not for that."

"Man, dost know thy juggling will bring thee to the gallows, an thou escape my searching sword? 'Tis a thing of folly to perjure a nobleman's good name away and gain his estates by forgery and lies, but 'tis a thing of madness to lay hands upon a woman known to all good swordsmen. The king's justice will find thee out, for the king's favor is a sudden shifting weight and that makes the king's justice sometimes just."

"The king's justice, fool of an outlawed lord! 'Tis the king's justice that attaints her. How could young and mortal maiden work the miracles with steel this maiden works were she not leagued by black magic with the foul fiend? She hath been tried by learned men and condemned, and I am appointed her executioner in the king's name, but I am first empowered to deal with her in such way as I may devise to bring her to repentance and to save her soul from hell. Methinks I shall have long patience."

The smile died from the eyes of Lord Winston. Wonder, horror and black rage flushed and paled his face.

"By our Savior," he groaned out, "never was so foul a soul as thine since Satan entered into Judas, nor so foul a crime 'gainst maidenhood. Now do I swear—"

"Listen to me, Lord Winston, ere your lordship swear away your life. Have her I will. An I must kill you, kill you I will; but to kill you is a task not to be challenged blithely, and I would avoid the trouble of it and wipe out the quarrel that stands between us. This tribute, then, will I pay to your great prowess, though armed you are with but an iron bar and must surely fall. Yet to avoid the trouble, and because of my admiration of so great a fighter, this will I do:

"I will, before the king's justices, avouch myself mistaken about the crimes charged against you, and I will return all your lands, fiefs, manors, and holdings vested in me by the courts as your creditor and heir, if you will quietly leave this place and offer no succor, now or at any other time, direct or indirect, of the person given up to me; nor spread rumors nor agitations about her other than she was in truth guilty of alchemy and necromancy, and that to your certain knowledge she practised such arts, and that she was probably carried off by the devil, or died the death the law and the king's justice provides."

Had Winston then had sword in hand instead of the rude and clumsy weapon he possessed, he had made such play within that smithy as would have made the odds seem light. But the picture of the maid's sore need, surrounded as she was, and all defenseless, by such a diabolical snare, made him cautious. He even halted the contemptuous retort that was on his lips from the moment the drift of Torrey's proposal became clear, for he knew that the moment he should definitely refuse the proposal, that moment Torrey would undertake the task of killing him, and he had it in mind to recover his sword ere he forced the issue.

He had made no answer when the bolt of the door behind him moved. The girl stepped swiftly from its light into the dimness of the storeroom.



In her hands were some things that could not be detected by those in the lighter smithy. Winston, in the equal light at the entrance to the storeroom could half discern. He stepped toward her. She stood in front of him and looked up into his face with great, glowing, unsubdued eyes.

"Lord Winston," she said, "an you be true and leal gentleman and gentle knight I give unto you this precious sword of swords with which to protect a clean maid from foul shame, and place upon your head this cap of flinted Milan steel. But if you irk at the emprise give them back to me, and I will e'en hazard my way through myself, and may the Holy Virgin grant my body the pure mercy of clean steel, and Christ receive my soul."

Torrey and his minions waited, for they had not yet received Lord Winston's answer, and Torrey, judging men by his own aims, felt that his offer was of such tune to Winston's desires that it was impossible he would refuse it.

Lord Winston bent over the girl's hand, to excuse himself from the enterprise, thought Torrey, smiling. Lord Winston's hands grasped the hand that held the sword and pressed it swiftly to his lips as he took the glorious weapon. The balance and metal of it found swift affinity in his blood and tingled him with exhilaration. He swung the girl into his horse's saddle.

"Now, by God's light," said he, "never had I blade in hand until now. Ho, Queen! A queen shall ride thee, sweetheart. Now, follow me, the whiles I light her path with sword-flame. 'Sdeath, fool! Dost stand 'fore Winston? Crisscross! How sweet a blade!"

He parried high and drew the blade in seeming gentle gesture across the eyes and nose of one of Torrey's ruffians. But that steel wrist, seeming effortless, had borne the blade home, cleaving the wretch through face almost to the skull. Without interruption it circled upward and swept down, singing of death, while Winston negligently, almost indifferently, turned his body to avoid the other varlet's awkward thrust, and hewed him through neck to breast-bone, a corpse ere he began to fall.

Torrey had Winston's sword, besides his

own, but apparently felt the need of several more, for as the first of his men fell he turned and ran outside, shouting:

"Swords! Swords! Kill me this Winston."

Three men were rushing up at the first shout, but at the name Winston they lagged, knowing that one at least of them must die before they could kill the great swordsman, and each was unwilling to be the sacrifice.

Torrey drew a pistol, a weapon at that time rarely used and little trusted. True to repute, it failed to explode. Sir John now found himself encumbered, a useless pistol in one hand and a sheathed sword in the other, with Winston's searching blade impending, and Sir John promptly saved his own life by the most natural of all methods—*instant precipitate flight*. He dropped the pistol and Winston's sword, turned, and ran, fumbling for his own sword-hilt.

To do him justice, the knight intended his maneuver for retreat only. He intended to fall back behind his men until he could reduce his excessive armament to a more practical basis, but seeing their master in full flight, with the redoubtable Lord Winston upon them, followed by a huge, black charger, upon which was mounted a figure in shimmering steel, for so her dress seemed to them, the men turned tail and fled. Sir John was behind his men, certainly, and they were keeping him behind in good earnest, his shouts of rage only increasing their speed, the laughter of Winston following them like a lash.

Winston followed for only a few yards. He picked up the abandoned sword, tossed it to the girl, and then darted to one side to where Sir John had left his horse.

Torrey discovered the maneuver too late. His own sword was out by this time, and he turned and made a dash just as Winston was in the act of mounting, whereupon Winston, who could easily have been mounted and away, promptly slipped from the horse and met him steel to steel.

There were three swift flashes of light as the two blades met, locked, and quivered together in the sunlight, then Torrey's blade, trying to disengage, spun from his hand. Winston could have killed him then, but he had other plans.



"My mark," said he, and with incredible swiftness yet delicate skill he drew the point of his sword across Torrey's forehead, from temple to temple, and as the blood leaped out blindingly, Torrey, half believing himself killed, put his hands to his face and gave a moaning gasp.

Lord Winston laughed; that terrible and deadly little laugh so full of deep contempt and large mastery.

"My mark," said he again. "I spare thy foul life to make thee undo thy foul wrongs. No greasy king in Christendom shall keep thee safe when Winston comes for thee again."

When he realized that he was not killed, Torrey took his hands from his face, stopped moaning, began to curse, and tried to look about with blood-filled eyes for his sword. Winston put his foot on it, seized the hilt, and, with a quick wrench, broke it in two.

Torrey's men, who had evidently left their horses at the inn, now came into view, mounted, but by no means showing the haste they had made in departure. Their studied nonchalance was apparent.

"Walk fast and thou wilt catch us, Sir Thief," said Winston, and he turned and mounted Torrey's horse.

Urged to greater speed by Torrey's yells, the men were coming on.

"Whither, lady?" asked Winston, as he set the horses to an easy canter.

She made no answer, but looked at him a moment with brimming eyes, as one desolate. They rode on, and after a space:

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

"Whither, lady?" asked Winston again, very gently.

The maiden looked into his eyes, and her own eyes fell. She reached out her hand and touched for an instant the hilt of the sword she had given him.

"I have no protection but this, my lord, which my maiden hands wrought," she said, "and this I gave to you as my—as a true knight. I am but an outlawed maiden, innocent and hunted, and the sword and honor of Lord Winston are my only refuge."

Her words were faltering, as if her maiden mind were all confused and uncertain, and her brave heart holding courage whilst it trembled with unshapable fears.

Winston, ever ready of speech or with sword, looked at her and found no words, so chaste and pitiful yet brave she seemed, trying to tell him that she doubted not his honor, yet prayed his honor to endure the trust, her manifest weakness being her only stay.

Then was Winston purged as with fire, and in his heart was worship, and something new and wonderful. He took the small, strong hand and carried it to his lips.

"Not 'a' true knight," he said, "but *thy* true knight, and this will I sustain with this, thy sword of swords, 'gainst all the world, so help me the dear Virgin Mother of our Lord."

After them now pounded Torrey's men, now four in number, spurred to courage by the offer of a great reward. Lord Winston turned in his saddle. One man rode harder than the rest. Lord Winston laughed.

## THE LAST PORTAGE

WHEN I drift out on the Silver Sea,  
Oh, may it be

A blue night

With a white moon

And a sprinkling of stars o'er the cedar tree;

And the silence of God,

And the low call

Of a lone bird—

When I drift out on the Silver Sea.

Lew R. Sarcett,



# Watch the Yankee!

by  
William  
Dudley  
Pelley.



## I.

JAPANESE police official and American newspaperman looked at one another across the low-topped lacquered table. On the Yankee's features was a smile of tolerant amusement.

"Satsey," said he, "if I didn't love you because you were so gol-durned human, I'd take your old argument by the tail and tie knots in it."

"But, Marlin San," protested the Japanese in his very precise Harvard English, "wherein am I wrong? If it isn't jealousy that you and your people feel for us Japanese because of our great progress in the past sixty years, then tell me what it is that makes you watch us with such apparent suspicion."

"In the first place," laughed the big Yankee, "we don't regard you Japanese folks with suspicion. Get that idea out of your American-educated noddle and get an entirely different idea in. Maybe a lot of Germans would have liked to see us regard you with suspicion a few years back, so as to divert America's attention to the Far East while the Potsdam gang raised hob in the middle of Europe. But the thing didn't work, because it failed to take racial psychology into account. If there's any such antagonism between your people and mine as you seem to contend, it's just that—a state of racial psychology, Satsey. Jealous

of you? For gad's sake, no! We aren't jealous of any people on earth. But in the case of Japan, we have a feeling that we want to see you Japanese folks grow up right—and there's been things take place in the immediate past that sort of worries us that you, as a nation, aren't growing up right."

"I don't understand, Marlin San. Just what do you mean—this 'growing up right'?"

"Well, for instance: Half a dozen times since you and I and Scottie have been talking to-night, you've made reference to Japan's marvelous 'growth' within the last sixty years. You admitted that up to the time Perry opened your country to the world that you were an empire in darkest autocracy and feudalism. But you have claimed that, with the adoption of a new international policy of searching the world for the best the world could give you in the arts, sciences, politics, and educational systems, you have turned about and in that commendably short time accomplished as much in the way of progress as we white folks have in the past twenty centuries. And you've particularly riled me by emphasizing that we don't like you because you are smart, because you are beating us Yankees at our own game. Fie, fie, Satsey! A man in as big a place as you hold down over here in Japan ought to have a better grasp on world psychology than that."



"Well, if I'm wrong, Marlin San, be kind enough to tell me why there is a—a—certain reserve between our two peoples since we won the Russian war."

The humorous, tolerant smile never left the big American's features. He tapped off his cigar-ash into the lone tray on the table-top and puffed several seconds in silence.

"Well, in the first place ninety per cent of it was made in Germany, Satsey. Don't forget that."

"And the other ten per cent?"

"The other ten per cent is due to the fact that you Japanese don't quite grasp just what is meant by the term *progress*. Let me put it the other way around, Satsey. Tell me, by *progress* you mean that Japan has just as good administrative institutions, courts, educational systems, military organizations, transportation facilities, and other phases of a highly developed civic and national life as any other country on the face of the earth, don't you?"

"I do, Marlin San."

"Very good. Then tell me, Satsey, where did you get them?"

"As I said before to-night, we searched the wide world over among all civilizations and races and classes of people, and adopted the best we could find for ourselves."

"Then don't you see, Satsey, that you have answered your own question? What we white people know as *progress* is a far different thing than what you Oriental folks conceive. Inversely, what you think is *progress* we consider something entirely different."

"What, Marlin San? We're all good friends and allies here together. Tell me. Japanese people are never ungrateful to those who proffer them help."

"Well, what you call your *progress* in the past sixty years, we white peoples consider absolutely nothing but *adaptation*. Perhaps a plainer word would be *imitation*. At heart you folks are pretty much the same Japanese you always were; in fact, you boast of your ability to assimilate Occidental civilization while retaining at the same time all of your Japanese-ism. And there isn't any such animal, Satsumi. You can't honestly be both Oriental and Occi-

dental, friend, than I—William Marlin, American newspaper editor and press correspondent—can be K. Satsumi, the minister of public safety for the city and province in which we are sitting at this moment, by merely asking you for your suit, your boots, your shirt, and your collar. And if there's any feeling of animosity or reserve between us that's arisen in the last ten or twenty years outside of German manufacture, it's because of that; because you Japanese people have sort of made yourselves our debtors who thus far haven't returned much of anything to *our* civilization to reduce the account."

"I don't think I wholly understand you, Marlin San."

"In plain words and all good, big-brotherly feeling, then, Satsey, let's put it this way: You Japanese have indeed come out of dark autocracy, and perhaps barbarism, within the last half-century, and we hand you all due compliment and credit. But in doing so you've made yourselves the debtor people of the world. You've taken and taken and taken—from other civilizations and cultures and peoples, principally the white peoples, and given almost nothing in return. You've appropriated our systems of government and our military organization. You've taken our educational systems bodily, and appropriated to yourselves our arts, sciences, and business methods. Hardly a thing which you can mention by which the modern Japan has grown great have you invented for yourselves—and still worse, after taking all these phases and virtues and modern civilizations from the white peoples, you feel humiliated if we will not accept you all at once into the full-fledged adulthood of nations."

The Japanese official was silent and thoughtful. The American went on:

"We're not jealous of you little brown or yellow peoples, friend Satsumi, not in the least. You do us an injustice to think so. America believes in a square deal for nations as well as individuals, and nothing gets a cheer out of a Yankee so quickly and heartily as the individual or the nation who sees their own error, recognizes their weaknesses, makes a decision to make something of themselves, and struggles upward

to hard-won success. It's for a different reason that there's been a bit of reserve come between us of late.

"We white folks have felt rather disappointed in you that you should appropriate all we have had to give you, and proffer nothing but measly dollars in return. We white peoples, in these twenty centuries you refer to, have gone through blood and fire to evolve these systems and institutions of ours. We've birthed them in the travail of war and pestilence and intoleration and adversity. We've paid for them—an awful, awful price. History is merely an inventory of that price. *We* have truly progressed because we thought and fought these things out step by step for ourselves; only in the furnace of adversity and suffering do we evolve principles and characters and institutions that make us great, Satsumi.

"And now, after twenty centuries of this unremitting toil and bloodshed, you Japanese people come along in the year 1858, cheerfully looked upon the results of all our struggle and effort as though it was nothing, appropriate the results of all our evolution overnight, and claim you have *progressed* because by appropriating these things you stand to-day in a place of world-power. Putting it that way, Satsey, can you blame us white folks for being a bit disgruntled when you repeatedly assert that you are as good and great and powerful as we are? Looking at things from this standpoint, do you see what I mean when I say you have become the world's greatest debtor nation?"

The Japanese was a well-educated and fine-principled man. He saw the justice in the argument.

"I never had it put up to me in just that way before," he said. "I wonder, now that I stop to think of it, just why we Japanese have not originated something to strike off some of this world indebtedness against us."

"Well," replied Marlin, "if you want the advice of a friend, I think it's typical of the temperamental difference between the Orient and the Occident. In the thousands of years past, you Oriental peoples have developed collectively while we Occi-

dentals have been developing individually. And the development of individuality makes for initiative, and initiative makes for evolution and progress. You yellow peoples lack initiative, friend Satsumi. You lack it the same as we white folks lack your ability for fine art or imitation. Your brains don't work in that direction. Bear in mind there's no malice in telling you this. I'm simply explaining the feeling that has sprung up between our two nations that you have wrongly termed cheap jealousy."

"I understand," replied Satsumi.

"Japan does not need numbers of people, areas of land, or fleets of gunboats to become great, Satsumi. Those things may force consideration from the rest of the world for a time, but it adds nothing to the world's sentimental regard for you, makes you no friends, has nothing to do with the quality of the stuff that's in you. What Japan needs is a new heart and soul, the ability to grasp spiritual things as well as material, the willingness to make the rest of the world *her* debtor because of the benefits she has conferred on all mankind. Show yourselves a great big nation spiritually and altruistically, Satsey—bind the rest of the world to you because of the things you have evolved for yourselves and shared with the rest of the world as the rest of the world has shared that which it has evolved in the last twenty centuries, with you—and you won't need battle-ships or junkets for your royalty to cement the world's friendship."

The Japanese official nodded sadly.

"Well, perhaps," he said. "But my nation is young yet, remember. We have not yet found ourselves in the family of nations."

"Certainly. I know that perfectly. You're like a kid around sixteen years old who suddenly springs up to a height of six feet in a few months. Because he is as tall as his older brother or his dad, and eats as much food, and has to pay as much carfare, he gets the idea he is as big and important as they are. The disillusionment is sometimes painful, Satsey. When that kid has really come into adulthood and made his mark and contributed some years of



real usefulness to his family and his race, he won't need long pants and a mustache to call attention to his maturity or get him regard or prestige."

"But I won't admit," objected Satsumi, "that my people cannot originate—that they have no initiative. Their initiative simply works out in different ways from that of you white peoples. So far, the things we have worked out for ourselves, I admit, we have kept for ourselves; but, all the same, there is no real proof that we absolutely lack Occidental initiative. Put the individual Japanese alongside the individual American, man for man. Give them both the same problem to solve. And I'll wager that one will solve it as quickly as the other. He may not go about it the same way. But he will solve it."

"All right, then we're deadlocked. I don't admit it. I contend that if two such men were given that problem, that if the Japanese did find a solution, it would be by methods that the white man worked out long before the Japanese man ever dreamed there were white people in the universe. Imitation and appropriation again."

"I'd like to see that problem put to the test."

"All right, we'll put it to the test. Take the matter of these rice riots you're having this month. You won't let us go out into your streets because it is dangerous; the white foreigner might get mobbed or brained with a brickbat. For ten days now you've been having these riots. They're as bad as they were the first night, maybe a little worse. You've said twice to-night you don't know how to break them and stop them excepting by overwhelming police force which you can't always exert. Here's a case in point. I submit that your rowdy element has got out of control because you—individually now, we'll say—have presented to you a problem beyond your solution. Right this moment you're confronted with the same thing that might confront a white man in his own country. It's a good test case. You've had all the opportunity in the world to display initiative. Yet if a white man faced such a situation, I say he'd dope out a solution within forty-eight hours."

"The riots are being caused by German agents," declared the official. "We cannot fix responsibility on them."

"It's immaterial who's causing them; we have German agents trying to make all kinds of trouble in America, too. But we found the way to circumvent them."

"Then I suppose you hold that *you* could originate such a plan as would quash them."

"I won't admit I couldn't if that was my job."

"We were accustomed to a wager between ourselves now and then when we were at Harvard together, Marlin San. It was, I believe, the great American pastime. I should like to wager with you now that you, representing your race, couldn't solve this riot problem within forty-eight hours any more than I, representing mine, have been able to do since they started."

"Now you're offering me a job," laughed Marlin. "And I've got work enough to do out here for my papers. I came out to study conditions in the Orient, not turn instructor."

"But I would make it worth your while. Japan is not ungrateful, I repeat, to those who try sincerely to help her."

Marlin turned to his fellow correspondent, who had been an interested listener.

"What about it, Scottie? Should I try it?"

Scott shrugged his shoulders.

"We Japanese have always looked on you Americans as our big brothers. I am hoping that after the war that feeling will grow stronger. If you could help us to maintain order and do us a service now in these troubled times, you would only be cementing the relations along that line between us. And," added the Japanese, "you would be proving or disproving a contention that I should very much like to see decided."

Big Bill Marlin was not anti-Japanese so much as pro-American. Unwittingly Satsumi was appealing to his pride in his color and his blood. He knew, too, that his Japanese college friend's position was threatened by his inability to suppress the rioting which had lately broken out in his city as well as in others, and that his repu-

tation as a public official was being compromised.

"I would bet you five thousand yen, sir," Satsumi returned, after a moment, "that you could not think up a plan for stopping this disorder before morning."

Marlin laughed. He showed all of his feline, even teeth.

"What do you think about it, Scottie?" he asked the other. "What's your opinions of white men's brains when necessity has to be the mother of invention?"

Scott was a diplomat. He tried to appear at ease, and he shrugged his shoulders.

Marlin leaned forward, his arms on the table.

"You say these riots are being caused by German agents, Satsey?"

"We have proof of it. But we do not know their identity."

"I'll stop your darned old riots within three days for five thousand yen," he declared. "I'd want one night to look the field over, one night for action, one night to clean up. But I think I'd have the situation well in hand by the third night."

Satsumi had forgotten all about the contention of Japan's superiority or inferiority in the vastly more important and concrete possibility of solving a problem which he knew in his heart he did not have the brains to solve.

"I give you my word," he declared, "that I will pay five thousand yen to you if you would stop the riots in this city within three nights. The disorder is growing worse. It may spread to the capital. I may be criticised—or worse."

"Aho! As I thought! You really don't give a rap about proving the question of brains—white against yellow. You want to save your official neck. Well, Scottie here is witness to your offer. I'll undertake, single-handed, to squelch your rioting in this place within three nights, although if I really encountered an obnoxious person I might want to use your police force to get him into the Black Maria."

"You can have all the police you desire. But so far our police have been very ineffective. They are pitted against such numbers. There have been fatalities."

"I only want them in emergency, or to

help me clean up afterward. It's a go! Only I'm not doing it alone for the money, although my wife at home will probably find a way to spend it. I'm doing it because I love you, Satsey; because we're old college friends; because you're one Oriental out of a thousand who's willing to be shown and will admit when he is beaten."

"Thank you, Marlin San," the Japanese man answered quietly.

When Satsumi had gone, Marlin and Scott wandered up and down the wide corridors of the big American hotel.

"Poor folks!" commented the former. "They want to be somebody in the world like all the rest of us, Scottie. But they don't know exactly how to go about it. 'Wily Oriental,' indeed, Scottie. Doesn't the idea make you laugh? They're kid-brothers, that's what they are, Scottie, and I can't help liking them for their unsophistication."

"But, Bill, you've taken on a big order to quell these riots single-handed. You must have some plan in mind. How are you going to do it?"

"Darned if I know!" his companion replied honestly.

## II.

THEY went up-stairs finally, and to their room. The hour was ten thirty. Marlin sat down on one of the modern twin beds. The twinkle never left his eyes.

"Am I a blooming idiot, Scottie, or am I not?"

"I said you'd taken on a whale of a contract."

"I admit it. But aren't a Yankee's brains equal to it?"

"That depends on who the Yankee happens to be."

Marlin clasped his fingers around one knee. He tilted backward, his eyes half closed.

"At the age of fourteen I started away from a little Southern farm with three dollars and sixty cents in my pocket and Northern blood in my veins from a father who remained in the South after the war. That was twenty years ago. Sitting here on the edge of this bed now in Japan tonight, I'm worth a hundred thousand dol-



lars in cash and several American newspapers in securities. And no one ever gave me a measly dollar. Am I conceited? I am! But I've never got in a fix yet that I couldn't think my way out. Thinking one's way out! What is it but imagination? Brains, brains, brains! Gad, what capital they are for a fellow who hasn't anything else but his two hands and his appetite! And here I've got to turn 'em to quashing a city full of Japanese mobs incited by German agents. Well, watch my smoke!"

He laughed again.

Scott proceeded to remove his white pongee coat and pull apart his four-in-hand tie. Tossing the collar and tie on the dresser, he took a seat on the opposite bed and began to unlace his shoes. Next he pulled off his white trousers.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed. "I intended to buy a pair of white Oxfords tonight, and forgot all about it. I'd like to know what the polish is made of that these darned hall-boys use on the black shoes; look at the bottoms of my trousers."

He held them out for the other's inspection.

But Marlin was not interested in trousers, even though ruined by cheap Japanese shoe blacking. He stretched out on the bed and lighted a cigarette. For several moments he lay there blowing smoke upward, his eyes dreamy and far-away.

"The thing to do," he said at last, "is to get the leaders in these mobs. There must be leaders. And if I capture the leaders, the police ought to be able to make them give up the names of the Germans who are paying them."

Scottie got into his pajamas and laid the smooched white pants carefully aside for laundering on the morrow.

"But it's some proposition to fix responsibility on the leaders of a mob—in action. Have you ever seen a mob in action, Marlin?"

"Yes," admitted the other. "Don't forget I come from Georgia."

He threw the cigarette away, rolled over on his chest, and buried his face in his hands. Scott knew his traveling companion. He recognized that the other was thinking—dynamically.

Fifteen or twenty minutes ticked away. Scott thumped his pillow, fixed it in position, moved the electric light, and started to read.

Suddenly Marlin leaped to his feet.

"Well," he announced, "*I've got it!*"

"You've got it?"

"I have—thanks to you!"

"Thanks to *me!*"

"I said it. Thanks to you. You gave me the idea—the idea that will land forty or fifty German-paid ringleaders in Japanese calaboses by day after to-morrow night."

"When did I give you the idea?"

"I'll tell you after I've got them landed."

"Are you trying to kid me?"

"I am not. I mean what I say. I've found my idea." He stopped unlacing his shoes and chuckled. "Scottie—ever hear the yarn about the hurry call sent to the Governor of Texas once by the mayor of a Texas city who wanted the militia to quell a riot? Well, the train pulled into the station bringing the help the Governor had promised. The distraught mayor was there to meet the soldiers. But no soldiers appeared. Only one Ranger alighted. 'Where's the rest of your company?' the angry mayor demanded. And the surprised Ranger looked around blankly, then turned to the mayor and demanded: 'Why—there ain't but one riot, is there?' You know, Scottie, ever since I first heard that yarn I've seriously wondered just how that lone Ranger managed."

"Well?"

"I think I understand now."

"What's your wonderful 'single-handed system'?"

"You'll see in time."

"How do you open?"

"I open by dressing in Japanese clothes—kimono and *geta*—in fact, making myself over to resemble a plain Japanese gentleman if I can, and, after perfecting myself in a few Japanese costumes, sauntering forth to-morrow night and mixing with the mob, old man. In the morning you and I will make a few purchases—that is, if you care to go through the experience with me."

"You know me, Bill! But what kind of purchases?"

"That would be giving the idea away. Let's see—Satsey said the mobs usually start up around Ginza Park. Well, around seven o'clock to-morrow night we'll manage to stick around Ginza Park and do a little rioting along with the rest."

"Do a little rioting along with the rest! But what—"

"You're too blooming curious. Shut up and go on with your penny-dreadful."

### III.

FIVE thirty of the following afternoon brought Satsumi again. His collar was wilted, his hair disheveled, and he looked as though he had slept in his clothes. The average Japanese affecting Occidental attire appears mussy on general principles; the official from the department of public safety was in a mental condition where the least of his worries was his linen. He was a frump.

"You are going to give us the benefit of your imagination, Marlin San?" he asked anxiously. "I believe you said to-night."

He stood at the door of Marlin's big, airy room, torturing his grimy Panama hat in his stubby little hands.

"You're on!" the Yankee called cheerily. "Come in and find a seat. I'll need your expert advice on the make-up."

The American stood before his dresser unwrapping several inconsequential little purchases, most of which appeared to be toilet requisites. Over the back of a chair was thrown a medium-priced black kimono of the style and quality worn by a prosperous Japanese of the middle class. On the floor were a pair of *geta*, or wooden sandals. Scott was watching from his seat on the deep window-sill, his crossed legs dangling, his fingers secreting a smoldering cigarette.

"You are wearing a Japanese costume?" the official asked.

"You said it. I want to get out among your manufacturers of progressive Hades without any one taking particular note that I'm a foreigner."

"You mean you are going with the rioters?"

"I am. I'm going to do a little rioting myself."

"I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. If you did you'd be following out this little scheme yourself."

Marlin chuckled, sorted out the various little tin boxes and glass jars of the toilet articles and cosmetics he had purchased. Among them was a small sponge.

"I wonder," he mused, "how I'll ever manage to keep that sponge wet?"

"Keep the sponge wet? Of what use is a sponge, and why should you want to keep it wet?"

"Because with this sponge, Satsey," the Yankee returned, "I'm going to queer your local rice riots."

The Japanese peered intently into the other's face as though to learn whether the whole thing was a practical joke or whether his American friend had suddenly gone crazed in his wits. But Marlin, aside from his toilet exhibit, appeared perfectly normal and serious. He turned and appealed to Scott. But that debonair New-Yorker, in negligee and a brand-new pair of white tennis-shoes, made an "I-should-worry" gesture with his hands and a "You-can-search-me" motion with his shoulders.

Marlin was enjoying immensely the mystification he was causing. As he pulled his tie apart and unbuttoned his collar, he added:

"If I can keep that sponge wet somehow during this coming evening, I'll guarantee you most of your riot inciters and trouble-makers safely behind bars by the day after to-morrow. If I can't—well—I'll simply be out of luck, and you'll be out of a job."

"And it all rests upon the dampening of a sponge?"

"It does. Not omitting Yankee nerve and a reasonable amount of imagination."

Marlin disrobed. He sat down before the dresser in his union suit. He dipped into the cosmetics spread before him. He rubbed his face with yellow paste, and it became an olive brown.

"You do that like an old hand, Bill," Scott declared from the window-seat.

"In my thirty-four years I've followed every known human occupation but the priesthood and wearing out a jail. I did this a whole summer once at Coney Island."



He changed his complexion, penciled his eyes, surveyed himself in a side mirror, and grunted in satisfaction.

"Now, then, Satsey," he begged, "show me how to get into these black nightshirts you Samurai affect in public."

Skeptical but interested, the Japanese helped his American friend into the kimono. Marlin removed his socks and drew on over his bare feet, instead, the tight-fitting foot-covers of black silk, with the aperture between the first and second toes for the thong of the *geta*. When Satsumi pronounced him complete with his straw hat and his American umbrella-sunshade, Marlin, in light that was not too bright, resembled any prosperous Japanese tradesman of the middle class who might be returning from his office in the cool of the evening. He clogged a couple of times up and down the room.

"They're cool enough but mighty nerve-racking," he commented, referring to the kimono clothes from beneath which his bare calves protruded. "Mary Garden wore more than this when she was pinched. Well, Scottie, how about duplicating this little costume and coming along to view the obsequies? Or does my seminude appearance chill your feet?"

"I'll go, Bill," was the answer. "But I'm going in my good old Yankee habiliments."

Shortly after seven o'clock, when the summer afterglow was deepening into mellow Japanese evening and the rickshaw men were lighting the paper lanterns on their little two-wheeled vehicles, Marlin paused by the dresser and picked up two articles lying there done up in paper—objects about three inches in diameter and an inch in thickness, thrusting them into the sleeves of his kimono, for kimono sleeves are Japanese pockets. Each sleeve held one of the little parcels, the contents of which Scottie had not been able to discover. Then Marlin crossed to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and dampened the small sponge with as much water as it would hold without soiling his clothes. He dropped the sponge in one of his sleeves.

"Well, Satsey," he declared, "we're ready. Watch the Yankee!"

They slipped out the side door of the hotel, cut through a side street, and came upon three *kuruma* men at a corner.

"Tell 'em to take us to Ginza Park," suggested Marlin to the intensely interested Japanese. "If we spring the king's English on 'em in this get-up they may take us for missionaries disguised as German spies."

"And you desire that I accompany you?" asked Satsumi.

"Only as far as the park, to give us our bearings. Then I want you to fade. Some one might recognize you and think we were up to some kind of conspiracy. Which the Lord forbid!"

They took their places in the rickshaws, the *kuruma* men lifted the shafts, swung the little vehicles around, wiped their perspiring foreheads with the blue kerchiefs wrapped about their left wrists, and trotted noiselessly away in a westerly direction across the city.

#### IV.

Now, this is a peculiar thing about a Japanese "mob" of "rioters." It is deliberately manufactured. Among white people a mob is spontaneous, an outburst of popular concerted emotion. It may be born in a moment, do swift and terrible destruction, and within ten minutes disappear completely and leave the scene of the devastation deserted.

But the Oriental, having borrowed as per habit, the outward semblance, but not the inward soul and ethics of the piece, holds notice that he is intending to indulge in a mob, sets his date and his time and his rendezvous, and proceeds to his lawlessness like a caucus. It is not because the Japanese are inherently lawless that they express themselves in the mob spirit. But Japan being a nation where from time immemorial every person fears the person just above him and every one fears the government and the government, in turn, fears all the people, they have discovered that a manifestation of violence successfully carried out ultimately leads to some sort of official notice. Therefore has it been easy for German agents to provoke Japanese riots.

The unpleasant features about holding a riot are these: sometimes shop-windows are broken—which is lamentable, to say nothing of extravagant. Sometimes police boxes on the corners of intersecting streets are overturned and fired—which is horrible. Sometimes a brickbat, hilariously hurled, contacts with a human skull in such a way that sundry individuals are taken suddenly dead—which is both lamentable and horrible together or not according to one's bringing up. Therefore, on the whole, riots are undesirable.

Besides, they look bad in the foreign news reports. Because other nations—and especially the white nations—measuring by their own standards, are led to believe that the Japanese people *en masse* are out of hand entirely, and accomplishing things without limit or discretion after the fashion of a white man's mob—such as tearing up street-car rails and wrapping them around maple-trees or throwing taxicabs through second-story windows.

Yet, despite their mild peculiarities when measured with an American yardstick, despite the fact that time and location of a mob are known in advance, Japanese police are unable to cope with them. Therefore we have a narrative.

The darkness deepened into complete night as the little six-mile-an-hour vehicles wheedled their way softly across the quiet city. The streets were strange, for the shops were unlighted. Most of the fronts had been boarded up to protect costly glass from the evening's expected lawlessness.

The night was hot. After a time a soft, dim Japanese moon came up. In Japan in the summer-time most of the men go nude from the waist down and the women from the waist up. The streets are peopled now by these seminude men in white cotton shirts and bare brown legs. Women were conspicuously absent.

At the entrance to Ginza Park, the three alighted. They paid their rickshaw men and dismissed them. Then, as per instructions, Satsumi quitted them. That is, Marlin and Scottie thought he quitted them. They went into the park. They did not see him double back and gain an entrance to the great public gardens from another

gate, where he caught sight of them and shadowed them doggedly all that night.

"What's your system?" Scottie asked.

"We'll stick around until somebody starts something."

"And then what?"

"Well, we'll join in and raise Cain, too."

"We will? How will that stop the mob?"

Scottie regarded his friend for a moment. A light broke over him. "I begin to see," he said. "You're going to spot the ring-leaders and arrest them."

"Thanks," returned his friend dryly.

"You compliment me. There'll probably be a hundred leaders to this rough-house to-night. I sure must have to be some little arrester."

"But you're going to get a look at them and arrest them to-morrow or the next day, maybe."

"Yes, I'm going up with a little book, and ask each mob leader his name and address, and take it down so that some of these little comic-opera cops can call around the next day and pinch him. A great idea that!" Marlin was not sarcastic—not in the least.

"Well, what the devil are you going to do? Surely you can't remember the features of the leaders to-night out of all these Buddhistic mugs. And the chances are a thousand to one you'd never see them again even if you could remember them."

"I know it."

"Then how are you going to get them?"

"With a sponge, my dear boy—with a sponge," the other chuckled.

Scott scuffed along the broad driveway into the park beside his companion, Marlin kicking up little clouds of dust in the finely crushed traprock by his inability properly to manipulate his footwear.

"Stop a mob with a damp sponge!" the former mused. "Well, I'm stumped!"

"Of course you are," said Marlin. "So was Satsey!"

The park was filling with males. The little Japanese policemen, in their white uniforms, sour faces, and two-foot nickel-plated swords, were everywhere. No one was allowed to stop, nevertheless; though the police kept the increasing crowds in motion, they did not leave the locality.



Around and about the great park they milled, ready to start the riot on schedule, as per custom. And the police knew it perfectly.

Besides, if the truth were told, regardless of whether German agents were at the bottom of these sudden nightly disturbances, the police themselves had small heart in the business of stopping the rioters. Their chief objective was governmental action in curbing the profiteers and bringing down the high price of a great food commodity. The police themselves, paid the Japanese equivalent of fifteen to thirty dollars a month, were suffering, too, from the high prices. Although, of course, one K. Satsumi, being of another cast and rank, had nothing in common with their predicament.

More and more people came into the park. They kept in motion, but they kept coming.

"Business will be good," quoth Marlin. "Behold, we have many, many customers!" But the puzzled Scottie only scowled.

"I don't see how the crowd expects to start a riot with all these cops around," he said. "Bill, if there's so many of them that their presence puts a kibosh on the riot and I don't have the chance to see you shine after all this mystery, I'll drag you home by the feet and paint that complexion of yours on permanently with iodine!"

"Keep your shirt on!" the other ordered. "If the people keep coming like this for another fifteen minutes, the police will be as powerless to stop the rough-house as they'd be to keep back the ocean surf down at Yokohama with a whiskbroom. Let's see; Satsey said the trouble was due around eight. It's quarter to eight now. There's thousands of people in this park right at this moment, Scottie. Well, here's hoping I don't get pinched myself."

"You get pinched! What for?"

"Rioting, of course!"

"Rioting! Are you going to do any rioting really?"

"You bet your happy life, boy. I'm going to have the time of my life to-night helping pull up this town to look at its roots!"

"But you're supposed to stop the mob, not aggravate it."

"I'm supposed to do what I'm going to do. Just keep quiet and watch my smoke."

"Well," suggested the uneasy Scottie, "let's take another turn around the whole place. By the time we get back it'll be after eight and things ought to happen."

They walked completely around the park. It took them twenty minutes. On the whole, aside from a few fantastic Japanese shrubs, Scott realized that the place was not unlike any public park in America, for instance the Boston Public Gardens.

Suddenly big Bill Marlin grabbed his friend's arm.

"Gosh, Scottie, we're due to get buncoed!" he cried. "Look off here to the left under the arc-light. Come on, boy! We're missing the grand stand!"

A great commotion had started over in the other big driveway east from where they were walking. Marlin started forward with Scott after him. They were suddenly fused in with a mass of pushing, shoving, excited humanity, a thousand pairs of *geta* kicking up the powdered trap-rock of the parkway.

Up ahead an arc-lamp shone down on a half-nude man with the kerchief of a coolie wrapped about his closely cropped head, who had balanced himself on a stone post and started jabbering and gesticulating crazily. An excited rabble milling and seething, answered hysterically. Long-drawn, hideous screeches ending with the sinister "Hoosh! Hoosh!" of the fighting Japanese were taken up.

Two police sprang forward crying orders. Violent hands were laid upon them. They were lifted bodily over heads and tossed into the shrubbery.

"It's started!" panted Marlin. "Behold, we have a riot!"

He plunged into the milling mass of seminude humanity. Scottie felt himself propelled violently forward by the masses coming on behind. He lost his hat. Some one stepped on his stick and broke it off in the middle. He stumbled over somebody's lost *geta* and nearly fell headlong.

Catching himself, he saw his companion clawing his way to the front and fumbling wildly for the kimono sleeve in which lay the sponge.

Then the rioter on the post leaped to the ground. The long, weird cries, sustained and malicious, sounded with increasing volume afar over the city. The milling stopped, and the chaos of humanity resolved into a consistent direction.

It flooded and flowed down the wide avenue to the junction at the gate where Marlin and Scott had entered. The devastating swarm swept through and out into the city with the business districts before them. Pedestrians fled. The mischief was afoot. Into a narrow street the mob was wedged and the brickbats began to fly. A fruit-store stock was upset and a small cobble broke a forty-cent window.

And in the front rank was big Bill Marlin, as wild and excited and hysterical as the rest, uttering hoarse, incoherent cries and urging the vanguard onward!

Several times Scott saw him when the rioters got out on to the Ichi-Cho or main street of the business section. He was working himself into an absurd fury. He knew no Japanese language, but the language of a mob, and the language of a mob is not a language of words, but of froth and of action. And Bill Marlin had both.

They found a police sentry-box on a street corner, tipped it over, swarmed over it, stamped it into kindling wood, and waved the broken pieces ominously, continuously moving onward. Most of the shop windows had been boarded, and against them rattled and banged the brickbats. Now and then a bit of glass was smashed. A luckless rickshaw or *kuruma*-man had his little vehicle demolished. At one place a cordon of policemen appeared, charged down upon them, were turned and driven back, and they scurried off like white rats, diving into doorways and shelters and vanishing through alleys.

Another fruit-store had its stock demolished. A bicycle-shop was plundered, and scores of boys tried to riot on wheels. They were knocked off and bruised, and they left their machines behind for those following to stumble over and become battered and bruised likewise.

This was a Japanese "mob," cramming through the streets, shouting, shoving, throwing around fruit and little cobbles,

overturning an occasional police stand, now and then breaking a window. It had no especial place to go, no especial work to accomplish, unless a rice-shop came into view. Then the shop was entered and the Oriental food thrown out and scattered about and showered on the heads of the luckless like a gigantic wedding procession lacking a bride and groom.

Scott tried to get out of the *mêlée*. His new white shoes were ruined and filled with cruel bits of rock. His white pongee suit was a mess. Some hysterical person had once laid hold of his four-in-hand tie and nearly strangled him. Consequently his collar was wrecked and his head ached with the pommeling and jostling and shoving and pushing that had gone on all around him.

He was positive that Bill Marlin had gone completely loco. He was not trying to stop the rioting. He was abetting it, working the crowd to greater hysteria and fury, towering over the natives, yelling hoarsely, slapping them right and left on the shoulders, hammering them over their heads with the wreck of his umbrella-parasol, throwing fruit and cobbles with unerring American aim into the panes of unprotected windows.

Once a Japanese policeman made a pass for the big American with his sword. Bill grabbed the little officer and twisted the weapon from his grasp. He threw him bodily back into the crowd which promptly passed him on, yelled the louder, carried him to the edge of a canal bridge at hand and dumped him over.

Just once, far down toward the steamer docks, Bill Marlin and Scott came face to face. The recognition was instantaneous.

"Hoorah!" yelled Bill. "Ain't this the Charlie Chaplin of a time, though, Johnny Scott? I ain't had such a night since we painted Cambridge red, back in nineteen four and left old man Washburn's cow up on the roof of the Holworthy Dormitory. Oh, boy, kick in! It's glorious!" And with the whoop of a wild Indian he hit Scott a crack on the shoulder that loosened a dozen of his teeth.

"Bill! Bill!" cried Scottie. "Come back, Bill! There'll be hell to pay for this,



Bill. You ain't stopping nothing, you're only making them worse. And I thought you had some remedy up your sleeve for stopping it all and making good your claim to American brains. Oh, Bill!"

But Bill had gone onward in the pandemonium, and Scott was caromed around and around and finally spun out of the way and into a gate which gave way before him and precipitated him into an alley between two buildings.

Its cowering owner from his hiding-place on the premises ran forward with a club. A great shower of sparks suddenly bloomed before the rabble-buffed American and his head tried to explode.

When he opened his eyes—it seemed like an instant—the sun was shining!

### V.

"WHERE the devil does that sun come from?" Johnny Scott demanded.

He sat up in a cot bed and gazed blankly at the window. Then his head felt queer and weighty. He lifted his trembling hand and found himself swathed in bandages.

A little fat Japanese doctor, who looked like a Buddhist idol, came across to him. The doctor spoke English brokenly.

"You were not wise foreigner. You must stay in hotel while are rice riot."

"Where the devil am I?"

"You are in hospital. You were hurt in riot."

"Yes, that's it, some one danced forward with a club and cracked me a couple while I was down. I'm going back. I think I'd remember that guy if I met him."

"Very sorry," declared the doctor with his inscrutable grin and mask of superpoliteness, "but you cannot go until police have said so. You are under arrest for making riot."

"I'm *what*!"

"You are under arrest for making riot."

"Who said so?"

"Police; they said so when they brought you."

"So the police brought me here, did they?" Scott groaned. "I knew it, I knew it. Bill Marlin went completely off his nut and got both of us into this mess.

I suppose next thing they'll be calling us German spies and ordering us shot at sunrise. Where's my side partner?"

"I do not understand."

"By any chance there isn't another big Yank incarcerated in this amputation parlor who looks as if shooting at sunrise was too good for?"

"I am very sorry, do not understand."

"Am I the only American carried out of last night's ruckus on a door?"

"Door?"

"Dammit! don't you understand human conversation? Am I the only victim of last night's riots?"

"Oh, no," replied the doctor, "there are many of them; but you are the only foreigner—at least who was injured for hospital."

"Don't call me a foreigner or I'll make your head look more wonderful than mine. Where's Bill Marlin? And get the American consul here within ten minutes or I'll run amuck in this vivisection museum and turn all the customers out of their beds!"

"If you do not keep quiet it will be necessary for me to call police. They will remove you to prison."

"What for? I haven't done anything, only take what usually is handed out to innocent bystanders."

"Ah, but the police have proof."

"Proof? Proof your grandmother! Tell that to your ancestors. You've got the wrong bird. A crazy fool named Marlin is the Exhibit A you're looking for. If you don't let me go home I'll make this place look like Belgium."

Scott was becoming violent. The doctor summoned an attendant and spoke curtly to him in his native tongue. The man started away on a double-quick run.

"Do I get out of this place?" demanded Scottie. "Outside of my head I'm all right."

"The officials—I have sent for them. They will come presently. There will be explanations."

Scott was appeased but not calmed.

"What time is it?" he demanded.

"Three o'clock," the doctor answered.

"Three o'clock in the afternoon?"

"Yes."

"How long have I been in here taking the count?"

"You were brought here early this morning."

Scott lay back and considered.

"I know now why Bill wanted a damp sponge," he declared. "He had visions of himself with his own head busted open. Only instead of his head, it was mine. They've operated on the wrong Yankee!"

Within ten minutes the police came—a fiery little man who felt the weight of his position keenly. The doctor interpreted:

"You must go to the police station with the officer," he ordered.

"But I'm innocent!" swore Scottie.

"That is for you to prove," the doctor replied. "It is different in Japan than in America. It is for you to prove your innocence, not for the police to prove your guilt."

"I want to communicate with the American consul."

"The police will do that for you. You must go with the officer."

Plainly the little policeman had no relish for the job of handling the big American. He was a badly scared man. But what he lacked in courage he made up in dignity—and trusted to his ancestors to get him through safely.

Scott arose rather dizzily and suffered the young attendant to lace on his oxfords.

"Where's my coat?" he demanded.

"It will be returned to you at the proper time at the police station. It is being held as evidence."

"Evidence! My coat? This is certainly some country where the comic-opera cops go around arresting people's clothes! Well, come on, old doughnut-face. But if the American consul isn't there by the time we arrive at headquarters, I'll start something between the nations that'll make the California alien land-law look like Kaiser Bill's future!"

They went out and through the afternoon streets. They arrived at the police station, Scott being on the verge of fainting several times with the effort.

He was taken up-stairs where several little men in very big and imposing uniforms sat around tables.

"Where's the consul?" Scott demanded.

The officials indicated, none too pleasantly, that he should seat himself. An interpreter entered.

"We have notified your consul. There will be Americans over here shortly."

But Scott never heard the last of the sentence. He fainted and fell forward.

When he recovered, big Bill Marlin, in a fresh, natty, pongee suit, Panama hat, and white shoes, was seated before him, all traces of last night's disguise removed from his features; on them, instead, a cheerful grin. Satsumi was present also. The officers had disappeared.

"That sponge," began Scott in beautiful sarcasm, "you forgot to let me carry the otherwise useless thing for you. Can I borrow it now—that is, if you've kept it damp so long?"

"Sorry you got brained, Scottie, but on the whole you don't seem much the worse for it. You'll probably finish life without seriously noting the loss, I dare say. As for the sponge you make so much sport over, I kept it damp enough, thank you, to accomplish the purpose I had in mind."

"Oh, you did? You'll be telling me next that you stopped last night's riot."

"I did not stop last night's riot. I had no intention of doing so. But there will be no rioting to-night. Am I right or wrong, Satsey?"

"You are right," the Japanese admitted.

Scott looked from one face to the other blankly.

"Well, then, what the devil happened after I got the knock-out?"

"Nothing specially. The mob gutted a few more rice shops, wore itself out, injured two policemen permanently, and then went home to bed. On the whole, a pleasant time was had by all. But there will be no repetition. And Satsey admits the Yankees have shown him a new wrinkle to copy."

The Japanese looked rather chagrined.

"It is so," he admitted.

"You see, Scottie, if you hadn't met with an accident you could have been around last night and to-day to see the fun; but you had to go and get your day-



lights knocked out, and arrested besides, and as long as you didn't communicate with the consulate I couldn't tell where you were and come to your assistance."

"And you mean I'm arrested for my part in last night's *mêlée* and you're going free? You blooming rascal, you! You know very well who was in the lead of that riot, inciting those coolies."

"Which was all a part of the big idea," his friend replied. "Come on, Johnny. We've fixed the officials. It was all a mistake that you were arrested, anyhow. Or perhaps it was my fault. I never should have hammered you on the shoulders hard enough to loosen a dozen teeth."

"What's loose teeth got to do with me getting pinched?"

Marlin glanced at Satsumi.

"Shall we tell him?" he asked.

"As you wish," the Japanese replied.

"Because he's so beautifully sarcastic I'm minded to keep him guessing how I handled that mob and busted up these rice riots—at least locally—until we get back to the hotel." He turned to the door and put his head out. "Call three *kurumas*," he told the boy in the hall.

They helped the unfortunate victim of the night's adventure down-stairs and into the rickshaw. Scott had been given back his coat. From the color of it, surely it was excellent evidence that he had engaged in some kind of progressive hoodlumism; but it was a coat, and covered his torn shirt and battered arms.

Arrived at the hotel, Marlin helped his friend up to their rooms and into bed.

"Better go to sleep and slumber off that 'head,' Johnny," his friend advised. "By the time you're fit, the morning papers will be out and we'll know for certain whether my cure worked. If there are no riots anywhere to-night it ought to be a pretty conclusive thing that I made good last evening, hadn't it?"

"Keep your confounded explanations!" stormed Scottie. "I wouldn't listen to them for fifteen cents a word."

## VI.

SCOTT lay thinking for a long time after Marlin and his Japanese friend had depart-

ed—thinking and staring at the foot of the bed. His trousers hung over the chair that was placed directly in the line of his vision, the trousers that the day before had been spoiled by cheap Japanese shoe-blackening. On the corner of the chair-back, too, hung the pongee coat ruined in the previous night's pandemonium. Suddenly Scott sat upright in bed, disregarding the violent pain in his skull.

He reached for the telephone.

"Get me the office of the *Japan News and Journal*," he directed.

In due time he got the Englishman who owned that newspaper at the other end of the wire.

"Henshaw? This is Scott talking—Johnny Scott, of New York—you remember me. Henshaw, tell me something: have there been a lot of arrests this morning because of last night's rioting?"

"Yes, over seventy ringleaders have been taken into custody."

"And has anything come of it?"

"Well, I should say so; there wasn't a wrong man among the whole bag. It was so uncanny—the way the network of police all over the city brought in those ringleaders from so many districts, that they lost their nerve, broke down and implicated three of our prominent German citizens. I understand the Germans will be interned or deported. And the government's now salving the trouble over by selling a lot of rice on a subsidy."

"Do you happen to know how the police, in far different parts of the city, probably acting under orders, were able to bag the right men everywhere?"

"I know, Mr. Scott. But it's a police secret. They might want to employ the same method again."

"I understand. I just wanted to make sure my deduction was correct. There's a smart Aleck down-stairs who originated the idea, and I'm going to double-cross him. Henshaw, did a sponge have anything to do with it?"

Scott could hear the editor sputtering violently with indecision at the other end.

"Yes," he said finally. "How did you know?"

"Because I figured in that plan while it was being put in execution, and I've got a suit ruined that cost me thirty dollars. Thanks, old man. See you later." And he hung up the receiver.

He climbed out of bed and searched around in Marlin's closet until he found the Japanese kimono his friend had worn the night before. He ran his hands into the sleeve-pockets and found the object he desired. Chuckling, he crossed to the bathroom.

He dressed himself presentably as best he could with his head throbbing, and a few moments later returned down the big wide hotel stairs. One of his hands was hidden in a side-pocket of his Palm-Beach coat. He saw Marlin and Satsumi sitting before the same lacquered-topped table in the enclosed veranda they had been gathered around when the wager started two days before.

Scott walked up unnoticed. In place of a sponge he wetted his fingers with saliva, rubbed them on the object in his pocket in which was a little tin-box with the

cover removed, and then suddenly slapped his countryman on the shoulder with a blow that jarred the previously mentioned and requisite number of teeth.

"What the—" cried Marlin, springing up.

"Officer, arrest that man!" called Scott dramatically to an imaginary policeman in the doorway.

Marlin looked at the shoulder where Scott had slapped him.

On the white-pongee material, as clean and sharp and distinctly as it had shown for the identification of the city police on the shoulders of seventy Japanese rioters early that morning, was the *imprint of four fingers smooched with cheap Japanese shoe-blackening!*

"How did you discover I marked the ringleaders in that way?" demanded Marlin.

"Oh," returned Scott quite carelessly, "leave it to the Yankee! How about it, Satsumi?"

But Satsumi only made a despairing gesture with his hands!

## Nine Times Out of Ten

WAR, to the average German military expert, was, first of all, a spectacle; and the more spectacular it could be made, the better he seemed to like it. Von Kluck's drive on Paris was admittedly most spectacular, but, as it happened, he would have been a whole lot better employed at the then much easier job of capturing the Channel ports. What he and the German High Command seem to have forgotten most persistently in the early stages of the great conflict was the simple but potent fact that the principal objective in war is to *win*—and that the frills and furbelows of pomposity and power mean nothing whatever if they are not on the winning side at the finish.

There doesn't seem to be any particular connection between Germany's defeat and the business of writing stories. And there isn't, except that the unsuccessful story is unsuccessful nine times out of ten because the author has omitted a simple but all-important truth from his calculations. He has forgotten or ignored the fact that the most essential thing about the job of writing a story is the *story itself!*

While it is quite true that there are a great many good stories ruined by bad workmanship, it is just as equally true that there is a lot of good workmanship thrown away on bad stories—stories that are not worth the telling in the first place. Knowing how to tell a worth-while story in a worth-while way is mostly a matter of practical writing experience and the author's inherent artistry. But the matter of deciding *not* to tell a certain story at all—

That's fiction sense—plus!

THE LOOK-OUT MAN.



# When Ludlow Street Laughed



by Raber Mundorf

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

## I.

IT was Artist William Rawley, I believe, who said that Ludlow Street never laughs.

But Bill's opportunities for close observation were limited—owing to his fixed residence, which was Ludlow Jail. Furthermore, he only was repeating what others before him had said.

There *are* such crabbed pessimists: men who, in cold blood, will defame a character, a city or world—twist and pervert a half-truth to their own base purpose of sensationalism.

Ludlow Street's adults seldom smile, perhaps. But the pessimists are unfair to Ludlow's children, who they claim, don't know *how* to laugh or sing or play!

When the youngsters go to the public school opposite Ludlow Jail—that is, when they cannot escape the truant-officer or the factory-inspector, or if they are not too dirty and ragged to be admitted—they very often do learn to laugh honestly, and to sing and play, as well. Of course, between school sessions and during vacations they are too busy helping earn their keep to waste time in profitless merriment.

There isn't must to laugh about, anyway—if you live in the heart of the most

poverty-stricken neighborhood that the Ghetto can reveal anywhere from Cherry Street to the Gas-House District and from the Bowery to the East River.

Yet Ludlow Street had its laugh!

Not loud and boisterous—nevertheless, a laugh, despite its softly jeering note. It crept like a miasma, from Dvinsky's Hair-Dressing Parlor—ordinary barbering is unremunerative in Ludlow—to the Rumanian and Russian delicatessen-shop, "La Ciobanul din Vaslui," at Houston; infecting every garret, cellar, and tenement hovel, with its contagious, derisive chuckle.

And this was the way of it.

## II.

LOU RARIDAN mentally turned the leaves of his imaginary "Rule-Book on Young Ladies' Behavior" to the formula on "What a man should do when he forgets to show up on time to escort his fiancée to the play to which he has invited her."

The formula for procedure, if a bit tedious, at least appeared quite simple.

He would find Carol indignant, piqued, possibly bitterly offended.

His first move, then, would be to scourge himself mercilessly with verbal cat-o'-nine-tails; denounce himself before her as an inexcusably rude, selfish, inconsiderate chump

—and a fozzling ass who could not gage accurately the hours, minutes, and seconds required for a few rounds of drinks with the "boys."

She probably would endorse these statements—since this was by no means his first transgression, and her anticipated enjoyment of the Barrie play had been so keen. But the edge of her wrath would be turned.

After a further period of self-abasement, he could advance discreetly to the shamed apology and hopeful suggestion: "Nothing for us now, I suppose, but a Manhattan Roof show or a cabaret. What do you say, Carol?"

And from this point he could return safely and expeditiously to his own jovial self again. Simple—quite simple! With a little finesse.

The only difficulty Lou found was that Carol refused to behave according to formula.

Knowing Carol, he did not expect tearful reproach or an outburst of rage; neither, in fact, was essential. Still, he did not dream that any girl could be so emotional, under the circumstances. Her cloak lay in an unhurried fold upon the Louis Quinze lounge in the music-room. Only a calm seriousness was in her gaze, and the tone of her voice was quiet, almost patient.

The cumulative effect of all this serenity and poise was more disquieting to Lou than a tantrum would have been. There was something ominous about it.

"Really, Lou, it doesn't matter," she was saying—that much being encouraging.

"The only thing that does matter to me is this: with the present rate at which I'm losing respect for you, how long will it be before I shall have none left? Sounds like a problem in arithmetic or algebra; doesn't it?"

"I'd like to know the 'answer,' because I'm dreadfully old-fashioned. I do believe I want to respect the man I marry."

Finesse deserted the wilted Lou. Under her calculating eye, he felt like a "sum" on the blackboard—a sum from which the "chances of the prospective husband" were to be subtracted, one by one, until only a cipher remained and the board would be rubbed clean of him.

Carol now spoke reflectively:

"A great number of men seem to find it helpful to possess ambition or some definite purpose. Have *you* ever thought of taking up anything serious, Lou?"

Raridan's laugh was short and cynical. "The public's conception of a 'comic' cartoonist's life! Just one, long, grand joke! May I inform you that it's a serious enough job for me to get out a daily cartoon, a Sunday 'comic,' another 'strip' for syndicating, and my 'animated pictures' for the movies?"

"No doubt; but you've confessed that you have no interest in your work aside from the money it brings. And that goes as fast as you earn it. Something like the squirrel on his wheel; don't you think? He has his 'good time—hitting the high spots,' too, you know.

"Candidly, Lou, I'd rather you were a ribbon-clerk, working with an ambition to progress somehow. There would be hope for you then."

Imagine! This twaddle from the amusement-loving girl who accompanied him to every mask and artists' ball and "show" in town. If she had not enjoyed them, why hadn't she said so? It was on Lou's mind to unchivalrously tax her with this—when his heart sank like a plummet to unknown depths.

Carol was fingering her engagement-ring—the diamond solitaire he had given her. That she merely twisted the ring, absently, did not lift him appreciably from his depression.

Silences between lovers often come as a caress, a benediction, a communion of souls; again, they are painful and disturbing. Lou Raridan now discovered them in the latter classification, and did not delay his constrained "Good night."

He carried away with him a vision of Carol, standing in the reception-hall: the soft, amber light touching her waves of deep-chestnut hair with unexpected gleams and rich burnishings; her lovely face set in its resoluteness. Too greatly perturbed, he did not observe that her eyes yielded a trace of pity and—a close-guarded affection.

This picture of her did not help restore his tranquillity. Carol was in earnest. But



what could he do? How could he make himself over? A "gay life" always had appealed to him—it was too late to change habits already formed.

This was Lou Raridan's belief, which he straightway acted upon.

He quit the poker-game some time after midnight. In some strange manner, the pavement had usurped the functions of a treadmill; so that, while he kept moving constantly, he wasn't getting on. A night-hawk, recognizing his predicament, swooped down upon him.

"Where to, boss?" the cabby inquired when his fare had negotiated the perilous climb into the hansom.

"Round 'n' round 'n' round," murmured the weary Raridan, trying to pin his whirling head down to the musty upholstery and stretch his legs comfortably over the dashboard.

"Right you are, sir," said the cabby, confirming the instructions. He had had many a fare who wished to drive aimlessly "around," taking the air.

The cabby clucked from his perch, and the ancient equipage rattled off upon its journey to nowhere.

Lou was awakened by the loud and gleeful laughter of fresh young voices. His sun-worried eyes perceived that it was daylight. Removing his cramped limbs from the dashboard, he carefully pulled himself up to a sitting posture and looked about him.

The youthful shouts now were explained. Somehow a group of schoolboys had acquired his silk hat, and they were trying it on, in turn. Floundering from the cab, Lou rescued the hat; then, teetering by the curb, tried to orient himself.

Apparently he was in a cross street, somewhere off lower Fourth Avenue. The melancholy nag—doubtless second-hand, like the vehicle—was nosing pessimistically in its feed-bag. Yonder, at a lunch-wagon, the driver also was refreshing himself.

Observing that his fare was awake and up for the day, the cabby crammed the last of a sandwich into his mouth and came bustling thither.

"Good mornin'!" was his cheery greeting. "Fine day, sir. Now where, sir?"

Raridan peered under lowering brows at this excessively irritating chap.

"Nowhere," he grunted, attempting to rub his spine. "Got enough o' this confounded old rattle-trap. Needs new mattress." His speech, then and thereafter, was somewhat thick in utterance and suffered impediment, elision and liaison of syllables that cannot be rendered gracefully in printer's type.

"But you can't go about in yer full-dress suit, sir!" protested the cabby.

"Who says I can't? Go about dressed as I please! What's the fare?"

Lou discovered that more skill was required to count out the twelve dollars asked than he would have imagined. Finally in exasperation he proposed: "Make it five! Here's a five-spot right handy. Didn't take me where I wanta go, anyhow."

"Twelve it is, sir. Not a penny less! You says to drive ye aroun' and I been doin' it th' whole blessed night."

"Who wants to ride in that junk-cart all night? Did I say so? No! Had a right to ask me. You're too presumin'—too damn presumin'!"

Shaky in body, but still energetic in the defense of his "rights," Raridan lifted himself to the floor of the cab. Thus seated, with legs dangling outside, he was prepared to argue his cause indefinitely.

Eying him bellicosely, the cabby forthwith delivered this ultimatum: "Either ye cough up, or ye go tell it to the judge."

Raridan seized with delight upon the suggestion. "That's fair—perfectly fair! Let's put it up to the judge—any judge you name. He oughta be a man o' sense. Bet you a ten-spot I win—th' judge holdin' stakes!"

But the cabman already had leaped to his seat, and the horse now started with a jerk that tossed Raridan backward in a huddle.

The magistrate, while sympathetic, evidently had opinions of justice that conflicted with Lou's. Upon learning the identity of the artist, whose work appeared in the judge's favorite morning newspaper, he urged Raridan to pay the cabman's charge; explaining that the alternative was imprisonment.

For once, Lou refused to abide by the ruling of an umpire. It suddenly had occurred to him that his rights as a free-born American citizen were being trampled upon—and all bets were off! He hoped to go to jail, before he would permit an unjust, tyrannical court to uphold that thieving black-guard, meaning the cabby.

Therefore, the regretful magistrate was obliged to grant him his wish.

Apparently ennobled by martyrdom, Lou freely forgave the judge his "rotten decision" and offered to shake hands. Oh, yes! He had one little request to make.

"Your honor, if 'tis the same to you, I'd prefer a nice, comfortable jail like Ludlow—where I know Bill Rawley and some other fellows. Sort o' congenial atmosphere, y' know, so I'll get the right ideas for my 'comics'—and can send them along regularly to that other tyrant, the managing editor. He'll demand 'em—jail or no jail—the slave-driver!"

"H-m!" thoughtfully remarked the judge, who, being very human, would as soon have missed his coffee as the Raridan cartoon that went with it.

So it happened that Lou Raridan was committed to the "debtors' prison," Ludlow Jail—reminiscent, in certain aspects, of London's Marshalsea that was.

On the following day, which brought clearer vision, he could not have told exactly why he was there—except that a cabman had robbed him, under protection of the law, and that as a true American citizen he could not in conscience submit to the outrage, and would not. Furthermore, it was good sport and a decided novelty to join in the "beer and skittles" of the jolly "Alimony Club" in Ludlow.

He sent his drawings to the *Daily Sphere*, upon schedule; each strip and cartoon bearing as usual, beneath his signature, the tiny thumb-nail sketch of a teddy-bear—from which Lou derived his nickname, "The Teddy-Bear," dubbed him by the artists' fraternity. Now, it amused him to attach a ball-and-chain to the hind leg of the toy cub.

Nevertheless, the fun soon staled. Happy-go-lucky Lou was not meant for captivity, however gilded the bars of his cage.

After several days of durance, he collected his poker winnings; then, disregarding the taunts of the Alimony Club members, who accused him of ignominiously weakening, he sheepishly bought his way out of jail.

### III.

"GWAN, say it! Do yuh, or don't yuh, agree tuh t'row up yer job in favor of a better man—which is yours trooly?" demanded Zech Samstag, who had Hennie Hymowitz exactly where he wanted him.

Hennie darted despairing glances, this way and that, from the corner of Stermer's push-cart garage into which he had been lured. Possessing a high order of courage, however, he still demurred.

Zech planted the muzzle of an automatic in the pit of the young man's stomach and backed him up against the wall. Then, with his unemployed fist, the tough coolly battered the defenseless Hennie into a condition that precluded all possibility of job-holding for some time to come.

Kicking the sprawled victim once or twice, Zech cheerfully made his way across to the pickle-works and announced to the nervous manager that the *new* driver for their wagon would be on the job in an hour or so.

Zech's methods, while hardly those of a *chevalier sans reproche*, almost invariably brought results.

Driving a pickle-wagon did not appeal so very strongly to him, although, having just returned from the Island and hard labor, the job would not seem too exhausting for the few days he would hold it.

And, together with the drubbing, it afforded a convenient means of revenge upon Hennie. Of course, Zech's girl—Becky Levinsky—had been free to console herself as best she might during his absence, but it was Hennie's present misfortune that he had been the chosen recipient of her favors while Zech had been "doing his bit."

Well pleased with himself, therefore, this bantam of Beelzebub swaggered down Ludlow Street, bound for refreshment at Roller's Saloon. His cap was slanted cockily over one eye, and the hand that was not thrust into his pocket levied toll impartially upon Japanese figs, pickled herring



and vegetables, and other appetizers displayed by booths and push-carts along his path. Not even "the cop" walked with more assurance.

The vendors thus despoiled had not yet learned what Zech had done to Hennie Hymowitz; but they knew things far worse about the gang of thieving toughs and gunmen headed by Zech. So they muttered their protests into their beards; joining softly in the maledictions whispered by every honest man or woman who watched the notorious gangster pass.

The terror he inspired naturally increased the gunman's pride. And his triumphant progress was marked by a festal fountain of tobacco-juice spurting almost continuously from the corner of his mouth.

As he spat with contempt and arrogance, one of these brownish streams narrowly missed spraying the aristocratic boots of a gentleman who stood abstractedly outside the red brick walls and high, grated windows of Ludlow Street Jail.

It was characteristic of dapper Louis Raridan that, just released from prison, he had not the faintest idea of his next move.

He had concluded that Carol was lost to him—she might as well have handed him the ring and have had it over with; yet her extremely frank criticism had brought him a sudden, violent distaste for his work, so that he had arranged for a vacation from the *Sphere* office.

"Now what?" repeated Lou, whose plans had not gone into such petty details as to where and how he would spend his holiday.

Subconsciously he was attracted by a beer-sign, and his feet started ambling across the street. He was almost over the threshold before he discovered that the graphic presentment of a supposed "foaming glass" actually was the highly colored likeness of a tombstone, with its appropriate background of fleecy clouds and greensward.

This association of ideas so tickled his fancy that he turned from the monument-shop to grin into the window of the bakers' supply store. To his keen gratification, the grin was returned with interest by a pretty, sloe-eyed young miss at a desk inside.

Ludlow Street obviously was rich in diverting surprises!

"Believe I'll take a stroll here, while I dope out what's what," Lou murmured. And nonchalantly stroll he did, while awaiting the "idea"—after his manner of idly tracing whirligigs on bristol board, until inspiration for a "comic" arrived.

He walked north, past Delancey Street and the "hot-and-cold marble baths"; through the lane of jobbers' shops handling stationery, notions, and toys—toys destined never to reach Ludlow's boys and girls in the tenement rooms up-stairs.

Facing about, at the head of Ludlow, he retraced his steps—passing such busy places as the kosher meat-shops, and "live fish markets," with their wares swimming in a large tank by the window—from which each customer's choice was caught by hand-net and "landed," flopping and gasping.

His eyes was drawn to the ramshackle, Hebrew and Yiddish book-shop displaying almanacs, copies of the "Book of Holidays," profound religious treatises, ceremonial and prayer-cloths, candlesticks; while in the cellar beneath a produce-dealer was storing cabbages.

A "study" of a shawled old woman cutting huge loaves of sour black bread and selling them by the slice, commanded his interest. Back of her booth was a shop-window glorified by immense cheeses resembling cart-wheels and grindstones.

Thus he came to the curb apple-market, near Canal Street. He saw the barrels unloaded from drays and placed upright on pavement or in the gutter, and the wholesaler proceeding to remove the barrel-heads. Immediately, provision-store dealers, grocers, push-cart men, apple-women—all swarmed about; poking their fingers below the top layer of fruit; questioning, arguing, grumbling, perhaps denouncing the wholesaler as a thief and a robber.

Lou studied the excitedly chaffering groups—the straggly beards furiously wagging; palms raised supplicatingly; bodies writhing in agony of protest; a retailer's shoulders shrugging their resignation as—bargain closed—he departed sorrowfully with the expectation of reaping a paltry hundred per cent profit—or so—on his purchase. He marked the sober gray—the Jew's favorite color—revealed in long coats

and caps and shawls and dresses, blending in with the asphalt of littered street and drab tenements and bringing out in sudden contrast the cheerful, rosy-reds and bright yellows of the fruit.

"Oh, for a board and crayons!" he muttered, for the first time in almost ten years.

A suggestion flashed upon him. "Why not?" he asked himself at first, jokingly, then more than half in earnest.

When in art school, and a while after, he had been ambitious to do something "big"—painting, genre and portraits, maybe.

Hope of fame had fizzled out long before he had become "famous" as the creator of popular comics—but now—*now* he had a corking chance to indulge his old-time foible.

Indeed, why not spend his entire vacation, painting these amusing people? Admittedly, painting wouldn't bring him any money. He knew—because he'd tried it. On the other hand, he could think of no other holiday pastime that would run him *less* into debt.

"Christopher! Wouldn't it be a lark to live right here among my models!"

Louis Raridan was a creature of impulse. He spun on his heel, swung up Ludlow, and presently entered a shop that offered "bargains in new and misfit clothing."

"This makes me feel more in character," he thought, self-approvingly as he reappeared—now the "needy artist," togged in cheap worsted, a gray flannel shirt, limp tie, and worn fedora. His natty, expensively tailored suit was tied in the bundle under his arm.

He found Blochstein's a dairy restaurant agreeably clean; discovering likewise, a new edge to his appetite. Now refreshed, he repaired to lower Ludlow Street, to begin his search for a dwelling-place.

That afternoon, Lou came upon the room he sought—two floors above the "herring and fish" store that specialized in "new Matjes herring" and "real Halvah."

The dumpy, Russian woman was quite willing to crowd her brood into one room less—in behalf of a paying lodger; but she could not understand his insistence upon having exclusive control of the floor's bathtub—one of the few in the block. More-

over, her knowledge of the English tongue was limited.

Lou discreetly flashed a modest roll of bills, thereby promoting immediate understanding. The dumpy woman's husband was summoned, and after animated conversation between the couple, the man set forth the highest rental he deemed the "tariff would bear." To his disappointment, Lou accepted the terms without a moment's haggling.

A lodger to whom "money was no object"! Promising himself to raise this affluent fellow's rent in the very near future, the "landlord" supervised his wife's removal of the coal from the bathtub and the few bundles of personal belongings from the room.

Louis Raridan shortly found himself the possessor of a stunted apartment and a bathroom in miniature, but he took no great pride in either. Closer inspection merely intensified his dismay. Before he could begin regretting his escapade, he determined to get busy.

Luckily, hardship had been no stranger to the artist in past days. Experience guided him as he went out hastily to buy soap, bucket, scrub-brush, insecticides, and other household implements and supplies. On his way back he met an urchin hauling stolen wood in an "express-wagon," and despatched the boy to Ludlow Street Jail with a note requesting his drawing materials.

Lou was tired when, after hours of scrubbing, he gazed out of a now clean window-pane that overlooked the curb apple-market. His "housecleaning"—done of necessity with the door open, part of the time—had become the marvel of the tenement. Not even at Pesach, the annual cleaning-time, had his fascinated neighbors ever beheld the like! Then and there, "Philip Bradford"—the name he had assumed—acquired his reputation as an eccentric.

Philip himself was inclined to be pleased with his labors. "Won't be half bad when I get the walls patched and redecorated, the floor stained and covered with a few rugs, and buy some decent furniture—and an oil-stove," he soliloquized. Of course, he must watch his purse, which was not as



well-filled now as it might be. But, if necessary, he could sell humorous sketches—"pot-boilers"—to magazines.

His newspaper connection had no place in his holiday scheme.

After dinner at Blochstein's—which seemed the safest bet—Philip became convinced, as he sauntered down the street, that Ludlow was in the throes of celebration and was striving to make merry. He had sensed this before.

In fact, the Ghetto was observing *Succoth*—the harvest feast, or "Feast of Tabernacles." And the droning, humming sounds that he heard come from hallways were the chant of rabbies and cantors; mingled with the responses and shouts of the holiday-makers.

He passed through the hallway of his own tenement, and discovered in the rear court a bower constructed of lattice, intertwined with twigs and artificial greens and overlaid with boughs. In and about this "booth" men and women were singing, dancing, drinking wine, eating cakes. The fitful flare of gasoline torches illuminated the scene weirdly.

Philip, with an artist's appreciation, noticed particularly among the dancers two girls who never lacked for partners or for a circle of male admirers. One—whom he was to know better as Becky Levinsky—was sturdy, plump, ample of body and opulent of charms. The other, Rachel Inkelwitz, whom he was to know as intimately—carried her height and slenderness with the poise and sinuous grace of the Oriental girl whose head bears the pitcher from the well. She sparkled with vivacity.

Even the interest of this spectacle could not ward off the drowsiness induced by his strenuous day's house-cleaning. Philip presently retired to his room, and soon was slumbering soundly on the floor—in a nest of big red pillows stuffed with goose-down, which he had bought at the pillow-shop.

Soon, also, the party in the court disbanded. The celebration was to be continued indoors—not only because of the biting winds of this late September night. A special feast was scheduled for the evening; during which the head of each family would whirl a live fowl round and round, then

fling it far across the "banquet" board—thus signifying the casting away of sin.

Among those in the gathering below had been the Widow Polsky. She went upstairs—invited to the feast of a family who lived in a rear room on Philip's floor.

It was during the progress of this feast that the widow's two small children, whom she believed fast asleep in her room near by, ferreted out such attractive playthings as a box of matches and a can of kerosene.

Philip was aroused by childish screams and the acrid smell of smoke. He sprang into a few garments, and rushed into the hall—already thronged with frantic men, women, and children, tumbling over one another like sheep.

As fires in this district go, it was a trivial blaze. Engine No. 17 came clanging down from near Delancey, almost as soon as Philip had remedied the Russians' oversight and turned in the alarm. The assisting companies arrived with their accustomed promptness. And the fire was got under control and subdued, with no more damage than the gutting of the rear rooms on several floors. The incident brought to Philip, however, an experience out of which grew far-reaching consequences.

At some little risk to himself, he dragged fair Becky Levinsky from the suffocating smoke—and then the comely Rachel, who boarded with the Levinskys—and carried them, singly of course, down the stairs to the hallway below.

On the way down, each young woman revived sufficiently to study the pleasing countenance of her curly-haired gallant—but, mum of remonstrance and without the slightest inclination to "slam de face o' dis fresh guy," each was content to be borne in this romantic manner until deposited in a place of safety.

"Gawd! Ain't he handsome!" were the first words from Becky's provocative lips. Rachel said nothing, but her great, dark eyes spoke volumes as they followed the "poor young artist" who was running back into the smoke.

#### IV.

BECKY'S "old man" kept the poultry-shop—its window embellished with a

painted goose and a chicken, bill to bill in ardent conversation; and exhibiting, inside, a serried row of frowsy, half-plucked fowl.

The plucking was done by Becky herself—when she was not “under the weather” or off upon wayward adventures of the heart.

She was at her post this afternoon. Judging by her frequent interest in the clock, however, she was not likely to remain there long.

Presently she left her chair, and, indifferent to the wrathful glare shot from beneath old Levinsky's bushy eyebrows, slipped into her worn ulster. Becky was ready for departure, and said as much.

The old man said much more, heaping curses upon her head for her filial ingratitude and indulging in personal references that finally even stung through Becky's none-too-tender skin.

“Keep yer shoit on,” she advised. “Ain't I gonna shell out one o' de two plunks I earns dis a'ternoon? If yuh wasn't so tight, yuh'd hire a boy f'r fifty cents to do de pickin', and be satisfied wit' yer profit. But hog it all, if yuh wanten, an' woik yer fingers tuh de bone—as yuh say. I should live so!”

With this parting comment, she slouched out of the shop and promptly unburdened her mind of the parent's grievance.

Zech Samstag espied the familiar figure hurrying along the sidewalk of lower Ludlow Street. Shifting his quid to the other cheek, he lashed with unsparing vigor the emaciated animal struggling with the heavy wagon-load of pickle kegs.

“Hey, Becky!” he yelled—then, growling, as the girl halted: “Wot's all yer rush?”

Becky scrambled to the driver's seat. Crossing her nether limbs so that Zech would have been an extensive and satisfactory view of the “silken” hose which had been Hennie's last gift to her, she made nonchalant response:

“On me way tuh pose f'r a fine-lookin' artist guy wot's came tuh Ludlow. Dat's all.”

“Dat's *all*?” cried Zech, almost bouncing out of the seat.

“Artist, heh? Posin'! Well, yuh cut it

out. I ain't goin' tuh have no lounge-lizard sloppin' over *my* goil. You tell 'im so—y'understan'? Or I'll knock his block off, an' yourn, too.”

Becky jumped lightly to the pavement. “T'll yuh will!” was the clear, cool reply as she swung up the tenement steps.

The gunman, thus publicly defied and insulted as never before, scowled wolfishly after the disappearing girl. For a moment, it seemed as though he would follow. Then gathering up the reins and whip, with vengeful threats, he took it out on the unoffending horse. Nevertheless, that sneaking artist was engraved upon his memory.

Phil Bradford was absent when Becky opened his “studio” door and entered without knocking. Such formalities are dispensed with—perhaps unknown—on lower Ludlow.

The artist happened to be outside Mrs. Bodansky's room, standing among a group of would-be sympathizers, and trying to make a sketch of the dry-eyed young widow who sat in dumb misery, her little daughter tugging wonderingly at her skirts.

Her case was peculiarly distressing. Levi Bodansky and his family had emigrated but recently from the “old country” to this land of promise. His New York employer—a former fellow townsman—had taken advantage of the newcomer's ignorance and had repeatedly cheated him of money, until Levi had despaired of making ends meet. A stranger and exceptionally reticent, he had learned of no Legal Aid Society or Jewish Relief Fund.

So, with his family slowly starving, Levi had slipped quietly from the room this morning after prayers. The tallith still covered his shoulders; the praying-band was clasped upon his forehead, and the tefillin wound about his left arm and wrist. He proceeded to the edge of the roof, prayed forgiveness from the God of his fathers, then plunged down six dizzy stories.

When Phil had obtained a sketch that rather pleased him, he returned to his room—to find Becky examining the portrait he was making of her.

“Does look somet'in' like my mug,” she grunted admiringly.

“Not nearly handsome enough for a pip-



pin like you, Becky," insinuated Phil, in mock disappointment.

"Tie de bull outside! Y'oughta gimme a real chanst—and make a pitchur o' me in me glad rags. I gotta swell charmoose dress, sewed over wit' beads, artistic. An' my velveteen tam wit' a crushed rose tassel—oh, boy! *Class!* Believe me, if I do say so."

Becky couldn't see "the idea" of this portrait of her in working clothes, plucking at a goose, just as she worked—*when* she worked—in her father's shop. She certainly looked "classier" in her finery—obtained in various and perhaps somewhat devious ways, familiar to Ludlow Street. Artists were "queer guys," though, she admitted.

"That 'll come later, Becky dear," the artist consoled, as he transferred bold strokes to canvas.

Temporarily changing the subject, she said in disgust:

"Say, Phil, I meant tuh leave dis 'ere goose f'r you to cook up. But de ol' man wants it to-morrer tuh sell. So I'll take it back in de mornin' and bring yuh a fresher one. Mebbe he'll forget about *dat*. Penny-snatchin' ol' crab!"

"Thanks just the same, old dear," acknowledged Phil, coughing slightly while he bent over his palette.

"There, I guess we've finished for to-day," he said, some time later.

Over his shoulder the girl murmured critically. "It ain't so rotten—though I'm sure some swell in de charmoose!"

The man looked up meditatively into her face. "You're swell just as you are, Becky darling," he softly flattered. What was it that the golden-tongued Solomon had sung—doubtless with some radiant daughter of Judea in mind?

"Behold, thou art fair—thine head upon thee is like Carmel—thy neck is like the tower of David—thine eyes like the pools in Heshbon—thy lips a thread of scarlet—thy mouth like the best wine."

Quoting with fervor to himself, he rose half-unconsciously toward lips that *were* a generous thread of scarlet, and touched them with his own.

Phil speedily learned that if Becky's neck was like "the tower of David, builded for an armory," her mighty arms were as the cedars of Lebanon for strength.

Encompassed by the violence of Becky's sweet passion—enfolded in her loving but crushing embrace, he felt his breath depart from him—as though from a suddenly deflated bellows—and his ribs crack in sinister warning. Phil thought he was done for when—

"There's some one coming!" he gurgled, brutally disengaging himself.

The exasperated Becky seized her coat, flung herself across the room, and opened the door upon—Rachel Inkelwitz.

"Wot yuh buttin' in here for?" demanded Becky, voice hoarse with wrath.

"*You* tell me foist about yer own buttin' in!" challenged Rachel.

"So dat's why yer allus late f'r supper," Becky mused, suddenly enlightened.

Angry glances clashed, and angrier words. Just when bodily conflict seemed inevitable, the alarmed Philip cleared his throat stentoriously. Becky hesitated, then proceeded down the hall, leaving behind her a trail of innuendoes, rich and racy—all of which had Rachel for their subject.

Rachel's eyes were snapping as she entered. Phil had thoughtfully turned to the wall the canvas he had been working on, but the half-plucked goose was in plain view.

"Dat's wot she's doin' here—bringin' 'im presents!" thought Rachel bitterly.

She controlled herself with an effort, and muttered: "Guess I'm early to-day, Phil. Got off a little sooner."

"I'll say you're a mighty decent kid to help me out at all, Rachel," said Philip warmly. No girl made a mint of money, covering umbrellas at the umbrella-maker's. And for some reason, Rachel refused pay for her posing. He didn't feel right about it.

The girl stepped behind the screened-off "dressing-room," which was one of "Phil's funny ideas," and shortly reappeared as Judith—robes flowing and sword in hand. When she took position on the improvised dais, Phil remarked:

"Heaps of light left, Rachel; but I'm not going to have you miss your supper."

"Where's yourn?" she asked pointedly, ignoring the goose. She knew that he wasn't selling any pictures. And Phil had stopped going out for his meals.

"Mine?" laughed Phil. "I'm living high, old girl! Peek into my bargain refrigerator, if you don't believe it. I wanted a little change from Blochstein's, so I hired myself as cook. Believe me, Beauty, as a cook I've got something on Oscar."

He could have added that, after seeing the health officer's cart travel down Ludlow—confiscating rotten fruit, decayed vegetables and putrid meats, his confidence was somewhat shaken in the food that other restaurants near by might provide. Besides, his present method was more economical—and he always had been cook at the camp.

"Well, if yuh want a change," carelessly said Rachel, who was waiting her chance, "I snitched two tickets to de Peczinznier Ball to-night, wit' eats; an' if you wish to go, I'd be pleased tuh accept of your escort. It's bot' 'full dress and civic'—you wouldn't need dress up."

"Now I call that sporting! Sure I'll go. Just to show you how flush I am, I'll run right over to the shop that has 'wedding-dresses and full dress suits to hire'—and I'll get a whole soup-and-fish outfit with a shiny kelly to go with it!"

Rachel, who could have hopped about in her excitement, felt this was worth several times what she had paid for the tickets. How elegant he would look—and what a splash they would make!

And they did make a splurge—Rachel in her crimson frock and imitation jet earrings, and Phil looking like the hero out of a play. It was whispered freely about the hall, on Essex Street—by young as well as by old—that there wasn't a handsomer couple on the floor. And dance—how they did dance! Phil even attempted a kazatzki, with fair results.

He himself admitted that he was "right there" this evening—"there" frequently meaning the informal buffet where "drinks" were dispensed, for a consideration. But, as he explained confidentially: "Beauty, it's been a long while between 'good times'—for me."

At that, Phil became no more than pleasantly "jingled." His fickle fancy was Rachel's one complaint. He flitted about like a will-o'-the-wisp. Coolly but gallantly he bestowed his acquaintance upon virtually every girl in the hall, were she plain or pretty; invariably dragging his latest captive away from her escort, for a whirl in the dance. Then on to the next—so rapidly and good-humoredly that even the escorts had no time for offense.

Rachel—whose reputation as a dangerous enemy, was well known among the girls—always succeeded in getting Phil back to her, however; and they finally left the hall, amicably together.

On their way home they came to Loraloff's, the Essex Street "photography studio."

"Wot d'yuh say, Phil, we get mugged?" the girl proposed craftily.

"Great! Jus' the souv'nir for th' 'casion!" he recklessly agreed, not caring now what happened to him.

With a merry chuckle, he swung her through the gate with the arch of iron grillwork, and they raced up the side stairs to the second-floor studio.

Returning, they had reached the sidewalk when Rachel stopped short. A young Russian Jew, distinguished by the unorthodox cut of his smartly trimmed beard, and a fur-lined coat with a near-Persian lamb collar, brushed by her—muttering brokenly, accusingly, as he passed.

"Who's your swell friend?" lightly inquired the artist. Then noting the man's sorrowful face—his distraught, almost desperate, manner—Phil looked sharply at Rachel. He saw that she appeared confused.

"What's the row?" he demanded.

"Nothin' much," she said eventually. "It's Micah Oskolsky, who's got a high-class joolry push-cart on Grand Street. Mebbe he's sore because I turned him down f'r de ball. I should worry!"

Phil shot a penetrating glance at the girl. "Your steady fella, eh?"

"Oh, we've had a sort of understandin' an' so on, and he gimme a bum ring; but—say, look where de poor prune's goin'!" Her voice rose angrily. "Trottin' wit' his



*sourith* (trouble) to Lawyer Pardow, 'stid o' comin' to me like a man. Dat's Micah, every time! Anyt'ing at all happens, an' right away he goes to law. Lotta good it 'll do him!"

She scornfully watched the man disappear into the old frame building, on the second floor of which was plainly visible from the street an extensive and imposing law library, its book-shelves brilliantly illuminated, by many electric lights which the attorney kept focused ingeniously.

The artist quickly sobered, remarking in a serious tone:

"Sorry I didn't know about Micah. We haven't been playing exactly square with him, do you think? Now, you two had better make up; perhaps he'll forget your turn-down-to-night."

"Much I care whether he does or don't!"—rebelliously. "I ain't tied to 'im fer life. Dey's others"—long lashes swiftly veiled her dark eyes—"wot I t'inks more of."

In silent disapproval Phil gave the girl his arm, and they turned west toward Ludlow. She, too, after pouting, grew taciturn, sullen; but brightened and clung more tightly to him as they entered the black-shadowed hallway of the tenement.

"Much obliged to you for the bully evening, Rachel. See you to-morrow." Gently loosening her arm Phil nodded to her kindly, stepped to his door, and passed within.

For a while the girl stood dumbly, staring unbelievably at the door that had closed after him. Then, staggering against the wall, her back to the unyielding surface, she drew her tense, quivering body to its full height, arms outstretched and clenched hands pressed hard against the plaster, breasts heaving, head flung back. And she panted with a wild, bitter, passionate anger:

"He left me—left me wit'out even a single kiss—damn him!"

Beautiful as a moon over the gardens of Cedron; cunning, in many ways, as a serpent; strong and implacable as Judith, daughter of battle, Rachel Inkelwitz was not accustomed to be scorned!

Philip, after lighting the gas-lamp, sat down thoughtfully before his easel with its half-finished painting of "Judith," fierce, burning eyes searching into his.

He rose abstractedly and reached for the painting of Becky. His fingers encountered only a stack of sketches and studies. The painting was gone.

While he yet stood frowning, there came a rustle at the door. To his surprise the visitor proved to be Becky herself; brave as to attire, featuring the inevitable "char-moose," and otherwise agitated.

She bore a large, flat parcel. When she had burst open its wrappings, the missing canvas was disclosed.

"Dat fresh guy, Zech Samstag, cops it," she explained in a fury. "We was havin' a drink over tuh Klotz's, an' he owns up he'd been here tuh see you about somet'in'. You was out, and he swipes de pitchur instead. Get de noive?"

"Who is Zech Samstag, and why did he take the painting?"

Becky tossed her head, explaining with a shrug and a sneer: "Zech's my ole fella. Gets on 'is ear—cops de pitchur jes' because I was posin' for it! Right along he's been bawlin' me out for posin'; says goils don't pose for nò good—only tuh be made love to an' so on.

"I says he's a liar—your jollyin' and kissin' bein' none o' his business."

Philip gnawed nervously at his lip, at last deciding:

"I think we'd better call off the posing, Becky."

"But I *wanta* pose, Phil!" she cried, puzzled. "Wot's dat *mashuka* Zech got tuh do wit' it? I'm done wit' *him*."

"Have it your own way, then," was the short reply.

"What could I want wit' *Zech*?" murmured the charmer, as, dismissing the unpleasant topic, she leaned invitingly toward Phil.

He turned away crossly. "You'd better run along home, Becky," he said.

In some way the girl found herself in the hall, wondering how and why she had got there. Arms truculently akimbo, she gasped explosively but futilely:

"Now, wouldn't dat make yer hair curl? Ain't 'e got sense enough tuh see where 'e stands wit' me? Why didn't I take de exasperatin' snip 'cross my knee an' spank 'im or choke 'im?"

The disgruntled Amazon tried to reason it out, starting with the premise that Phil might be jealous of Zech. But—the argument being beyond her realm of elemental facts and primitive impulses—she was obliged to give it up. Anyway you looked at it, it didn't seem possible that a "live guy" like Phil could be also such a "boob"!

Rotten luck, too! For she could almost taste that kiss he hadn't given her.

#### IV.

UPON the floor of the only oasis of brightness and cleanliness in forlorn, ill-favored lower Ludlow Street knelt a likable young man, his brow a thunder-cloud, a laughing twinkle in his eye.

In front of him pranced a child, who seemed out of place in Ludlow.

"Now, stand still, Joey, you little rascal, or I won't draw you any more teddy-bears," the man scolded for perhaps the seventh time.

Like most artists, Phil Bradford was not lacking in manual dexterity, and the snaps on the little undergarments seemed absurdly simple, if only the youngster wouldn't squirm so.

He glanced up from his task, to see buxom Becky Levinsky looking in, sourly, from the doorway.

She and Rachel had this habit of bobbing into the studio with irritating frequency. And their comportment was at times disturbing.

"Good morning, Becky. How's the mother?" he inquired in a decidedly conventional tone.

"Mom's gettin' on 'er feet again," was the disinterested response. "De ol' man's raggin' me tuh come back tuh de shop 'safternoon.

"Yuh seem to be havin' trouble, Phil," she added with faint sarcasm.

Phil snorted good-naturedly. Then—so long as the girl was here:

"Be a good Samaritan, Becky, and finish dressing this little eel. Then take him in with you for a while, will you? I want to go over toward the Bowery for that Christmas tree. Joey's had his breakfast."

She came in somewhat reluctantly, while Philip bustled into his overcoat before Joey

could begin a vociferous pleading to go, too. Despite his courage in taking in little Joey Seigel, it is doubtful if Philip could have managed without the aid of the unwilling Becky—or of Rachel.

Joey's mother, who had lived on the same floor, had been doing finely, the "practical" midwife claimed, until some boob blabbed out the news that Mr. Seigel (in a hurry to get home) had fallen off the scaffolding, where he had been painting a dead-wall sign for "Klinger's Klassy Klothes." He broke his neck. Mrs. Seigel died in convulsions, and four-year-old Joey was left an orphan. Fortunately, perhaps, Joey's promised brother had been still-born.

Becky impatiently insinuated the youngster into his fine clothes, muttering the while her usual complaint: "Damn kid! Dat's all Phil t'inks about. Pity he couldn't fin' somet'in' better to do dan feed 'n' fuss over somebody else's brat!"

After straightening up the room—Phil was such a "pa'tickler guy"—and throwing Joey his toy soldiers to keep him quiet, she listlessly crossed the studio and sat by the window.

The girl had changed lately. Her high spirits, her boisterous jollity—which once had set her apart from most of the girls of the tenements—gradually had faded into a morbid brooding; and Ludlow Street, grimly chuckling, now recognized her as one of its own. So, too, it had been with Rachel Inkelwitz.

An older woman, shapeless, careworn, timorously shuffled into the room. Becky twisted abruptly, as one whose nerves are on edge; her morose expression became that of angry annoyance.

"Now wot de devil yuh doin', mom, outa bed?" she demanded sharply.

"How could I be peaceful with thee in here?" bitterly quavered the older woman in her native tongue. Her breath came in uneven jerks.

"What d' yuh mean—'in here'?"

The mother looked accusingly out of sorrow-stricken eyes, as she said with painful slowness:

"You know what all say he keeps this place for. And art not thou and Rachel and this man the talk of Ludlow Street?"



"Much Ludlow knows about his business! And yuh don't see any of 'em holdin' it against 'im, do yuh? It's 'Phil Bradford dis,' and 'Phil Bradford dat'—allus callin' on 'im f'r help or advice. Got deir doity hands in 'is pockets all de time. D' yuh know 'is latest?"

"Strunsky, de cobbler, wot lives wit' his fam'ly out in de hall underneath de stairs, gets sick. Wot does Phil do but make a drawrin' of deir coop—which he 'as no use for nohow—and pays 'em ten beans f'r de priv'lege! Jes' one sample!"

In a less ruffled tone she observed: "For me, dey c'n keep dere kin' woids. Let 'em talk." Then, with cruel enjoyment of the effect produced: "Wot would yuh t'ink if I says I wished tuh Gawd it was all true?"

"Oi; oi! That I should bear me such a daughter! Thou wilt bring me to my grave!" wailed the horrified parent. Out of her lamentations rose the mournful complaint:

"It was not so in the old country. There a father could rule his house, and bring up his children in the ways of righteousness. Here, how can he watch and keep a family, where thousands and tens of thousands all live together like the cattle? How can there be virtue?"

"Yet it is not enough that our sons and daughters should sin among themselves. A *schaigotz*—one not of our faith—must come to tempt them!"

The girl surveyed her mother disgustedly.

"Well, wot if Phil ain't a Jeheudah? Can't he live anywhere he wants? This ain't Rooshia—this is Noo Yawk. Come up to date, mom.

"An' temptin'? Say, yer talkin' troo yer *sheitel* (wig)! I ain't no saint. It's Phil wot's got de col' feet."

Sniveling and shaking her head, the old woman murmured plaintively: "I do not know what evil spell hath come over thee, Becky."

"Dis is *one* t'ing wot's de matter wit' me: Yuh gotta get Rachel Inkelwitz out, or somet'in's gonna happen! I'm sick o' her shmoosin' over Phil an' dat kid. Jes' to-day I fin's in her room a pitchur of her an' Phil"—referring to the pose at Loral-off's studio, of which Phil had lost recollec-

tion, but which apparently had not slipped Rachel's memory. "She ain't got no more right to it—dan me; an' Gawd knows I ain't!"

"Oh, can it, mom!" as the parent broke out afresh. Seizing her by the shoulder, Becky bundled her out of the room, yanking Joey along.

Joey's Christmas party began, on the morrow, with his terrified flight from the tree—Christmas trees being a very great rarity in Ludlow. What with Phil's activities as the strange, new "Santa Claus"—who distributed numerous gifts to the tene-ment children—and the prolonging of the Christmas tree party for the better part of a week, it was not until early on New Year's Eve that he found an hour for work. This hour he spent in assorting his sketches and canvases.

Then, consulting his watch and entrusting Joey to the Levinskys, Philip hastened up Ludlow Street.

As he paused at Hester Street for a word with the humble street vendor of fish, who withdrew benumbed hands from above his pail of glowing coals to wave the genial Phil Bradford a greeting, a shadow crept from the concrete, tunnel-like "family entrance" of Klotz's saloon. It resolved itself into Zech Samstag, gliding forward in the direction that Philip had taken.

Folk who had seen Philip pass now quaked with dread at the sight of the notorious gangster, so obviously upon the trail of his "rival." They noticed, or so it seemed to their frightened eyes—that the gunman's fingers kept stealing repeatedly toward his hip.

With the gunman in pursuit, Philip moved on to respond briefly to the cordial salutation of the important grocer, whose open sacks of grains, cereals, and curious seeds covered half the sidewalk space outside his store. From this point the artist hurried at a good, round pace, shortly turning in at Grand Lyceum Hall.

Zech's plans apparently frustrated for the time, he stalked into Roller's for comfort, while Phil Bradford busied himself within the hall, where he was to address a mass meeting held to enforce action upon improvements desperately needed in some

of Ludlow's tenements. A Yiddish newspaper editor would translate Mr. Bradford's speech for the benefit of all. Whatever opinion Ludlow Street might hold of Phil Bradford's studio, it had learned to admire his shrewd common sense and respect his superior wisdom in other matters.

By one of those coincidences that happen in the worst, as well as in the best, regulated streets, Tom Travis happened at this time to be paying a consolatory New Year's Eve visit to his friend, Bill Rawley. Address: Ludlow Jail.

When Tom had torn himself away from Bill and Bill's lugubrious retrospection, he paused outside Ludlow Jail to light his cigarette. While fumbling for a match, he chanced to look across the street—and forgot his cigarette entirely.

That certainly could not be the-always-immaculately dressed Teddy-Bear? But by jingo! he believed it was! As Lou Raridan's old chum and Carol's cousin, it behooved him to find out more. He followed on foot, after directing the chauffeur of his taxicab to keep him in sight, and drive slowly along behind.

There was still another member of the procession—a tough who had appeared from Roller's saloon, and who seemed as eager as was Travis to catch up to Bradford.

Philip already had laid the sleeping Joey on his bed behind the screen. He barely had started pulling on his pipe when there came a courteous knock at the door. This in itself was unusual enough to cause Philip to wonder.

"Lou Raridan turned a bloomin' hermit! Great thunder, man, what fool stunt are you up to now?" cried Travis, still pumping the other's arm.

"You knew I'd left Ludlow's most imposing residence," said Raridan with an uneasy laugh. "Well, I'd rather a scene with Carol, and needed a vacation, anyway."

"Vacation!" the other exclaimed indignantly. "That didn't give you the right to go into hiding like a crook that's wanted. How do you think we've all felt about your disappearance—and what about Carol?"

"I tell you, man, it's hit her hard. She's admitted she said some things off the

handle to you, and now she's all broken up for fear she's caused you to do something rash."

"I'm sorry about that—mighty sorry," confessed Raridan. "To tell you the truth, I thought it was all off between us. Didn't think she cared. She said things that punched my self-complacency full of holes. More than hinted I was something of a rotter. And the deuce of it is, I discovered she was right. I've been trying to find myself in my work here, Tom."

Travis turned in curiosity to the nearest stack of sketches and canvases indicated, then proceeded to examine them swiftly but earnestly. He grimaced dryly at a scene of the curb apple-market, exaggerating its grotesqueries and the avarice of the bargainners. This expression held as he thumbed other studies, done with the same trenchant, ironic humor.

"Still a caricaturist, eh?" he pronounced frankly. "Clever, too."

"That lot represents my earliest work; discarded 'em all this evening. Try this other pile," Raridan advised.

He labored to conceal his anxiety during Travis's examination of the work. His friend's verdict meant more to him than he dared admit. Travis was an artist who *knew*.

The visitor's brows were knotted with incredulity. "Impossible! Why, there's sincerity here — and idealization!" he breathed, unconscious of Raridan's painfully rapt attention. At length, reaching a canvas upon which the paint was scarcely dry, he gazed at it in open admiration.

He held it up for another inspection—a sympathetic, almost reverent portrayal of patriarchal Grandfather Levinsky lighting the eighth floating wick of the oil cruse, on the last day of Chanuca, "the Feast of Lights."

"You are coming along as a painter, Lou," at last he commented. "My congratulations!" And Travis scrutinized his friend with a new, puzzled interest.

Raridan made no effort to hide his elation. "Lord, but I have worked hard at it, though, Tom! Done nothing else, day or night, save a few pen-and-inks for the funny mags."



"Hello, what's this?" exclaimed Travis, who, roving about, had found two other canvases. He brought them under the light. They were "Judith" and "The Goose-Plucker."

"Good work. Damn pretty models you must have had, too. Who are they?"

Feeling rather uncomfortable, yet assuming an air of calm detachment, Raridan explained: "Only a couple of girls in the tenement here. That's the way with many of them—dazzling beauties at twenty; hags at thirty."

The other continued his study of the canvases, while Raridan's embarrassment grew. Finally laying them aside, Travis said with unmistakable firmness:

"Now, Lou, you're coming out of this ghastly hole. We won't stand for this sort of idiocy. Keep up your painting—you've *arrived*. Have a studio, here, if you insist; but we'll expect to see you lodged at the club to-morrow. And, for the love of Moses, look up Carol without wasting a minute. You never mean harm, but sometimes, old man, you are the limit!"

Raridan, eyes lowered, fingered awkwardly at his pipe. After a moment he muttered doggedly:

"I can't come back, Tom; I'm not sure of myself yet. Tell Carol so, please. My work's here. I must stick with it until I've accomplished something. I—somehow—I can't explain, Tom."

"Nonsense, man, you must—" began Travis's rush of violent protestations, which ceased as suddenly.

At the open door stood a rough-looking individual, in whose hand, shaking dangerously with emotion, glittered a leveled revolver. It was Zech Samstag, and he obviously meant business.

"I ain't got nottin' on you"—designating Travis—"so keep yer mout' shut, if yer wise."

"What have you got on Mr. Raridan?" coolly inquired Travis.

"'Raridan,' yer eye! I'm after Phil Bradford—dat stinkin' bird dere wot calls hisself an artist. No guy c'n come between me an' my goil and get away wit' it."

"Aren't you mistaken, brother?" Travis pursued.

"Mistake, hell! Ain't dat Becky Levinsky's pitchur right dere"—pointing to the canvas near the easel—"an' didn't he get her tuh pose—yeh, pose f'r 'im? She *posed*, all right; an' after dat told *me* tuh go tuh de devil! Mistake? Ast 'im yerself!"

Travis looked critically at Raridan, whose discomfited eyes sought the floor, as he muttered: "It was only a little piffle."

"Yeh, piffle f'r you!" wound up the volley of oaths. "But wot about de guy wot loses out? Me! Mebbe I c'n go tuh de devil, like she says; but dey's some one else goin', too!" The half-crazed fellow advanced a step, his purpose evident and deadly.

Travis's cane described a quick arc, ending abruptly with a smart crack, and the "gun" clattered to the floor. The enraged tough rushed at him. Followed a sharp mix-up, terminated by Travis giving his adversary a lucky shove that sent him reeling over the threshold into the hall. Travis slammed the door shut, then listened, presently hearing the gangster's feet padding down the stairs.

He turned with angry irritation upon Raridan.

"You've got yourself in a pretty mess—with your 'girls of the tenement,' and your 'piffing,' and whatever other fool mischief you've included in your 'work' here!"

Raridan, who had been standing in a daze, too heavily borne down by humiliation to move hand or foot, now mumbled defensively: "That chap was all wrong, Tom. I know I've made a fool of myself, but not to that extent. I'm ready to stand up to him or anybody else to clear myself and the girls."

"Come on, you fathead! Beat it from here as quick as you know how! Don't you know you'd have that tough and his pals on your neck before you'd ever have a chance to explain. You're *through* here."

"Take these"—Travis thrust the paintings of "Judith" and "The Goose-Plucker" into Raridan's hands—"and gather together whatever luggage you want to take. I've a taxi waiting down below."

They made several trips to the cab. While Raridan was packing below, his

friend ran up-stairs for another load. He was stooping to pick up an armful of sketches when he heard the whimper of a child; and Joey—awakened by the noise, but up to now huddled in a terrified ball beneath the covers—crept from his bed behind the screen.

"What next?" hollowly groaned Travis when he found utterance possible.

He did not even bother to question Lou Raridan, who, coming in, bundled up the child and his toys and clothes, comforting the youngster in the following asinine nursery patter:

"Joey, you're going to take a ride with Uncle Phil to our nice new home. Say by-bye to Ludlow!"

#### V.

BECKY had arrived at that point where she either must have it out with Phil or do something desperate—something for which she and perhaps others might be sorry. Therefore she doubtless felt that the present moment was as propitious as any.

Her exit and passage along the hall to Phil's studio were marked by Rachel Inkelwitz, who seemed all the more ill-pleased because she herself had been contemplating some such visit.

Becky found the door open, took a step inside, and immediately froze to the spot. Her head revolved—at first slowly, then quickly—around most of the points of the compass, while her eyes grew big and round—and, yes, scared. Then she ran to the lamp, still dimly burning, and turned up the wick.

It *was* true—Phil *had* gone! He had taken only his art work and Joey's belongings; but, beyond question, he had *gone*.

So inconceivable, so impossible, it was that Becky simply collapsed into the easy-chair.

There she sat befuddled, trying vainly to piece together her shattered world, when in the doorway appeared, deliberately and cautiously, Zech Samstag's face.

Unwinkingly it gazed, and evilly grinned, like the wicked relative of a Cheshire cat. And it saw, as Becky had seen, that the artist had passed out of Ludlow Street.

All of which, Zech confessed, was a fairly

satisfactory disposing of his rival, even though it lacked certain dramatic elements of a just vengeance.

So, flourishing the new gun he had gone out to obtain, Zech Samstag stalked in to gloat.

Becky concentrated her attention more and more closely upon the gun. As she looked she straightened out of her slump and stiffened perceptibly.

"Wot yuh doin' wit' de gat?" she demanded. Then, prompted by intuition: "Where's Phil?"

The calmness of Becky's tone was misleading; although, for that matter, Zech never had considered the feelings of "skoits." Just now it pleased him to play the part of a hero, assuming laurels that would add greatly to his prestige in Ludlow Street. Twirling his gun with a careless significance, he bragged:

"Last I seen o' de models' fa-vo-rite, he an' de kid was beatin' it down de street f'r anudder part o' town. Didn't even stop to say fare-thee-well, 'e didn't!"

No hero could have wished for a more responsive audience, or have committed so grievous an error of judgment.

But the gangster was no more surprised at what shortly happened than was little Abie Feigenbaum, who had halted by the banisters outside, as an interested spectator. Abie, whose ambition was to grow up a gunman like Zech, had just come in from pitching pennies and drinking beer in Klotz's court. However, he still was able to see clearly all that went on.

For a brief, strutting moment Zech was permitted to wear his laurels.

He next was conscious that, somehow, his gun had been wrested from him (otherwise there might have been a different story to tell), and that the girl was shouting in his ear:

"You pulled a gun on Phil Bradford and chased 'im! You gutter-snipin', thievin', moiderin' crook—you!" continued by a remarkably well-sustained string of expletives and lively metaphor. Nor did that end it.

Without further delay Becky grasped the gunman by the neck and banged his head against the wall until the plaster came rattling down. Then she slammed him to the



floor, jumping with both feet upon his face. Still not pausing for breath she took him in her capable hands and proceeded to mop up the room with him.

Subsequently Rachel Inkelwitz found her kneeling on the gunman's chest, actively plying her fists and nails upon his countenance, now mauled and torn astonishingly.

"Who is he and wot's de trouble?" inquired Rachel, who had been drawn to the studio by something stronger than idle curiosity.

"Oh, dey ain't no trouble!" panted Becky. "Dis doity crook, Zech Samstag, jes' runs Phil outa Ludlow wit' a gun—*dat's* all!" Lurching upright, she threw back her head in the wild laughter of hysteria.

Rachel stared as though she had not heard, except that she seemed gradually hardening to a curious immobility. Then her gaze began to travel deliberately about the room, eyes slowly, very slowly, narrowing until only the pupils were visible—two small points of eyes that were black and strangely glossy, and as chilling as a serpent's.

These she presently fixed upon what should have been the gangster's face—now but a raw and bloody ooze. On its surface, apparently, floated a pair of buttons or periwinkles, out of which Zech Samstag goggled in terror at Rachel.

The chilling black points kept the bobbing periwinkles transfixed, the while through Rachel's scarcely parted lips issued

the low-pitched, close-clipped, deadly warning:

"You! Git—outa—here—and—stay—out. If I ever see yuh in Ludlow again—I'll—rip—yer—fishy—eyes—out!"

She turned and walked from the room.

Horrificed gurglings were bubbling from that which served Zech for mouth, as Becky reached down, gripped the mutilated wretch, and dragged him to the stairway, down which she tossed him with no more compunction than, in saner mind, she would have shoved out the dirt at cleaning-time, before Passover.

The excited Abie closely followed. Leaping over the prostrate form, he ran out eagerly to herald the astounding news.

Then, north and south through Ludlow, this almost incredible report seeped. Back and forth—from curb, stoop, fire-escape—the story was softly bandied, until old men were croaking their delight, old women clucking in quiet ecstasies of derision.

The entire street shrugging with ironic chuckles that were none the less enjoyable for that they were voiced scarcely a vibration above silence.

What a joke! That a redoubtable gangster and gunman, the terror of Ludlow Street, should have been beaten up, driven from the street (for he never returned)—and by *girls*!

Not all of Ludlow's eventful past had yielded such a delectable, satisfying treat. *What a joke!*

So, Ludlow laughed.

(The End.)

## RIPPLES

THE happy breeze comes dancing down,  
In romp and laughter playing;  
And babbling brooks in shady nooks  
Unto my heart are saying:

"Though summer hath her churlish clouds,  
The daffodils keep swaying;  
And autumn shines and drips her wines,  
Though men are through with haying.

"All life is youth, and youth is love,  
And shall know no decaying;  
Weep not above a buried love,  
For after snow comes Maying."

Herbert Randall,

# Breaking Loose

by Wallace M. Sloane



## I.

AN atmosphere of adventure, as well as of riches, is wont to pervade mushroom cities. From the discovery of vast mineral resources in some scraggy hills, a little somnolent, arboreal village finds itself famous overnight and begins to make strides after its more prosperous neighbors. Sons and grandsons of men who crossed the Rockies in 1849; men who blazed the trail into the Klondike; scions of middle Europe and eastern Asia, to say nothing of ancient Palestine, are suddenly seen on its streets.

The mines and factories are only part of its attractions. Wherever there is money there must be schemes for extracting it from its unhappy owners; and with the first blast of mills and factories come dance-halls, pool-rooms, a race-track, places for eating and drinking. The phoenix of romance flies overhead with flaming wings; mystery stalks with every man; love—not always idyllic and modeled after copy-book maxims—walks in the shadows of unmade fortunes.

Through such an atmosphere Professor Julius Laidlaw, meditative and spectacled, strolled down Main Street of Nebo City, which was "destined to become the mineral and oil center of the South." Without knowing it, Professor Julius (aged twenty-four) was subtly infected by its spirit—or was it the spirit of dogwood blossoms and the first call of mating birds?

The town was teeming with incipient

surprises; anything might be expected to happen. In proof of which he surprised even himself: he turned aside into the Golconda rooming and eating-house.

If he had known nothing of the Golconda there would have been no cause for surprise; but in chapel and church he had often held forth in mild invective against the place. Of all shady places in Nebo City, the Golconda was a shade the shadiest. Men had been known to go in sober and come out like proverbial lords. Upstairs, chips passed and bones rattled at all hours of the night, and twice men had been found dead in its halls—from loss of blood. And the girls who danced attendance on the restaurant tables were as saucy as they were nimble and pretty.

What would Aunt Agatha, of Pembroke, Massachusetts, say—if she could see him now? Or old Miss Pemberton, his godmother and lifelong mentor?

He sat down at a corner table and a girl came to take his order. Without stopping to analyze the girl or his own emotions, he was sinfully pleased at the turn things were taking.

"Order, please?"

"Oh-ah, coffee and pie. Mince," he added.

While the girl was away he stealthily took in the details of the room. Six waitresses of varying types and sizes hovered around the counters and tables. The few diners were quiet and orderly. He glanced with a thrill of unwarranted awe at the stairway leading to the mysterious rooms



above, and was rewarded by nothing more awe-inspiring than the sight of a fat man trudging heavily down for his dinner. A player-piano above tinkled a very respectable tune. The whole place seemed quiet, even respectable.

The girl returned with his coffee and pie.

"Anything else?"

He answered negatively with thanks; still the girl remained. It was a custom at the Golconda for waitresses to talk to patrons during lulls in business.

"My!" she exclaimed. "What a pile of books!"

"Text-books," he said deprecatingly. "Greek and Latin. I'm instructor in ancient languages at the academy."

"Oh!"

"I just finished college last year, and when my uncle came down here as president of the Acme Refractories Company, I saw my chance. I'm from Massachusetts, you know. Pembroke."

"Oh!"

She crossed her arms over the back of her chair and smiled down on him, showing the prettiest row of teeth that it was ever Julius's good fortune to see. The smile itself wasn't half bad. Then, in the absence of music, she proceeded with the entertainment.

What she said would make poor reading-matter. It was plentifully spiced with slang, and showed a fine disregard for dictionaries and grammars; but it was warm and piquant and personal, and in less than two minutes Julius was beginning to feel that he had known her a lifetime. Her name, he learned, was Margaret Strange (but everybody called her Marge) and she would call him Julius—he was entirely too young and decent-looking to be called professor.

"A fine, unspoiled girl," mused Julius. "A little careless and given to colloquialisms. But naive and good-hearted and—"

But just then his grain of faith was rudely crushed. Two young men entered and called hilariously:

"Hello, kid."

Instead of crushing the revelers with disdainful silence, Marge answered them in

their own language and went to take their orders. Julius was painfully surprised to see her pat one's shoulder, while the other, shaking hands, held on to her fingers several seconds longer than was necessary.

Julius was almost disillusioned. But before he had consumed his second cut of pie she was with him again, chattering and laughing and looking into his eyes.

He carried her smile with him into the street. His knowledge of women was limited to one class—Aunt Agathas and potential Aunt Agathas. In common with his sex he had the habit of card-indexing women either as good or bad. He reflected sorrowfully on Marge's slang, and regretted to have found her working at a place like the Golconda. Too bad. She was such a pretty, tantalizing little creature, too.

He walked leisurely. It was a big, velvety, starry night, but even more enchanting than the whispers and allurements of spring were the voices and lights of the rising city. He was possessed with a feeling of pride. Out on the hills to the east multitudes of coke-ovens, with fires that were never quenched, gleamed through the darkness; and flames from the rolling-mill lighted up the countryside for miles. The rhythmic chug of engines and the clang of hammers were in the air, as they would be all night; and within a bow-shot two dances and a skating-rink were in full swing. The dances were so near each other that the music mingled on the street in discordant noises.

It might be questioned that the harsh whirl of mills and factories, jazz music and dances, could suggest romance even remotely to one of Julius Roundtree Laidlaw's birth and training. But where men spoke casually of fortunes made overnight, and won or lost thousands with the stroke of a pen, the imagination was prepared for all things.

Julius was not avaricious, but he had an honest man's respect for money. All his life he had lived on the prosaic common ground between poverty and competence. When he came South he invested his meager patrimony of two thousand dollars in the Acme Refractories Company, of which

his uncle was president. The ganister was plentiful and of superior quality; there was a demand for silica brick, and the stock began to soar.

Encouraged by his success, he then bought two vacant lots, on which he paid in monthly instalments. They came high, but already he had been offered twice the purchase price. In the course of time they would enhance in value a thousand—ten thousand per cent!

Small wonder, then, that he gazed through the beauties of a star-lit spring-night at the flamboyant works of man. In a few years he would be rich. Of a sudden it came to him that he was young; that all life was before him. The thought was new, for until that hour he had never really felt the spirit of youth.

"What does it matter," he reflected, intoxicated with future success, "whether she's exactly an angel or not? I suppose—perhaps Aunt Agatha was right when she said I had a whole lot of Great-grandfather Swindell in me, after all."

He called at the restaurant again, and later at No. 7 Courland Street, where Marge lived with her mother.

He never forgot that first evening, when they walked home from the restaurant. While Marge removed her hat and went into another room to speak to her mother, Julius stood and looked at some bric-à-brac and photographs on the mantelpiece. There his eyes were arrested by an envelope addressed to Marge in a dashing, masculine handwriting, and there he felt his first jealous pang. He was about to pick it up and examine the postmark when Marge reentered.

They sat together on the faded velvet sofa, and what they talked has no special significance. Perhaps Julius discussed a book—which was about all he knew to discuss; perhaps they talked of love, friendship, and kindred subjects. Marge always did, in the opening stages of her romantic friendships.

It is significant, however, that Julius raised his hand, and, being engrossed in talk, let it fall on Marge's hand at his side.

"O-oh, I b-beg your pardon," he stammered confusedly.

After that he called again and then again. Gradually shadows of suspicion began to haunt his thoughts. Marge frankly liked hand-holding and "spooning." She called a spade a spade, and to his sensitive ears her ruthless murder of English savored of a flippant disregard for the seventh commandment. He had heard of women who were false to their sweethearts—even false to their husbands.

Was she naive and indiscreet, or subtle and—wicked? She had had other men friends; and sometimes, even in his most blissful moments, he began to wonder angrily which of them had held her hand before him. The woman he loved enough to marry must be as good as his mother.

He began to take her poems and stories of an uplifting nature; sometimes he insinuated them into his talk. But obviously Marge was not interested in ethics. Her code was to have a good time, stand by her pals, love friends and hate enemies. That it also embraced hating cruelty and injustice of all kinds argued little to Julius's inflexible New England conscience.

After a few weeks of this he came to his senses and abused himself for his lack of self-respect. Of course the mad infatuation would soon wear off. What was there in the girl to appeal to him, anyway? Though she were as pure as Lucretia, the noble victim of Tarquin, still marriage would be beyond the question. A certain amount of grammar and moderation in slang are also requisite to a happy union. Marriage with her would certainly blight his career.

Accordingly he terminated the "little affair" as speedily as it had begun. One evening he left her with the intention of going back no more, and, being of a strong will, he kept his resolution a week. When he returned his madness increased ten-fold. Absence had only whetted the edge of his folly.

Just how it happened, Julius could never explain; but Aunt Agatha's evil prophecies were fulfilled to the last jot and tittle. The Great-grandfather Swindell in him came to the surface, and as one in a dream, Julius found himself grasping the girl in his arms, kissing her again and again. She



struggled in his grasp, but in the ecstasies of the moment he was conscious that her efforts were only half-hearted.

Quite as surprised as the girl at his boldness, he released her and stepped back, smiling. Why, at just that particular moment, he let his eyes wander from her face to seek confusion and despair elsewhere, is one of those unexplained little ironies that abound in life.

At any rate, he saw on the brick hearth-place—two cigarette stubs.

Mistaking his absorbed interest in the cigarettes, Marge hastened to put him at ease and give him the liberty of the house.

"Smoke, if you like, Jules; it don't bother me at all."

Julius never remembered whether he answered her; the memories of that evening were always blurred and indistinct. He might have truthfully told her that he had never smoked nor taken a drink, and that he had kissed only one girl in his life.

Excusing himself on a silly pretext, he went out into the street. The presence of cigarette stubs in Marge's room could indicate only one of two things: either that Marge smoked, or that some one had been there before him. Surely it could not be her mother, whom Marge had always represented as a devout churchwoman.

Then among the fancies evoked by his jealousy came the thought that he had never seen her mother. Like all other mirages of love, he had blindly accepted the fact of her existence on faith. Perhaps there was no mother, after all; perhaps she was only a myth to give an air of respectability to Marge's existence.

After going such lengths of doubt, other hidden and forgotten things rose to stare him in the face. The very fact of her employment at the Golconda was incriminating. But why judge the girl from her environment when her avowed lack of ideals and frank love of pleasure condemned her?

It was not so much the cigarettes (though Julius hated them as an insidious poison) as what they suggested. However charitable one might be, one would have trouble in explaining their presence in her room. A raging jealousy possessed his soul. Things that she had said, at one

time or another—light, frivolous things, came to him in a new, evil light; ghosts of lovers whom he had never seen rose before him.

"Enough—too much!" he muttered, waving the unwelcome fancies away. "And only to-night I was going to ask her to marry me—fool that I am! Fool that I am! Thank, all the gods, I've come to my senses at last!"

He turned aside to his elegant suite of rooms in the new Hotel Grande. Disillusioned, he was yet determined not to become bitter; the world could never say that his magnanimity had suffered from his personal wrongs. He detached from the wall a framed photograph, at which he looked long and intently. It portrayed the pale, patrician features of one Miss Dorothea Bainbridge, as pure and high-minded as her family was old and poor.

"If she could only have been like you!" he apostrophized the picture. "If Marge could have only been like you!"

With which, dismissing the foolish little affair, he sank into a chair with a volume of Emerson. As Emerson somehow didn't fit into his mood, he picked up "True Stories of the East," ordinarily more interesting to his scholastic mind than a swash-buckling novel.

Somehow he could not become absorbed in reading. The foolish little affair would not stay dismissed. He recalled that Marge had one of his books, and he decided to send a boy for it immediately. That done, there would be no more occasion to think of her.

Stepping out to the front, he looked for a boy, but not one was to be found. Very well; he would bring the book himself. Slowly then he turned his feet toward the scene of his late folly. He would not admit that this was an excuse to see her again, though for the last time; that, as Marge would say, he was only "kiddin' himself along." But as he approached her rooms, his heart beat riotously, as from the effects of a cross-country run.

He paused at the rickety gate to straighten his tie and slick back his hair, but he did not enter. He was tremendously sorry that he had come even that far. If he was

a fool before, he was now a fool with two or three strong, substantial adjectives affixed.

## II.

MR. JACK CARTER was not of a displeasing appearance, though his face was suggestive of strength rather than beauty. By way of a more complete introduction—which belongs here, if anywhere—he began his last incarnation in Chicago, as a son of poor but dishonest parents.

His father, Jack Carter, Sr., was variously employed as cabman, porter in saloons, and street sweeper for the city, and his ill-starred life was ended in involuntary service for the State of Illinois. Of his mother, née Mollie Leeper, Jack, Jr., had only a hazy memory. If she had learned to read and write, her fate might have been happier, but she early escaped from the ills of ignorance and a trifling husband to others that she knew not of. Thus at the age of seven, Jack was left an orphan with two living parents.

At twenty, after a career as newspaper and stable boy, he conceived aspirations for the ring. He actually rose from the amateur to the professional class. But the laurels of a fighter never crowned his head. For one thing, he secretly indulged his preference for whisky and lemon-pie over milk and beefsteak. His evenings, however, afforded leisure for his studies in poker and dice, in which gentle accomplishments he attained a higher grade of efficiency.

Chicago proving too narrow a scope for his activities, he began to let out in ever-broadening circles. His twenty-eighth year found him in the far West, subsisting on the wages of a longshoreman and what he could pick up in an occasional game.

At San Pedro, California, he received a letter from a friend in Chicago. Jack was no scholar, but his Herculean labors on his friend's atrocious writing were many times rewarded. The letter stated that there was a boom in Alabama (which was somewhere down about New Orleans) where they had discovered rich gold mines and so many oil wells that it was difficult to obtain drinking water.

Ten days later found Jack in Nebo City.

The first thing that caught his eye was the fair grounds, with the uncompleted race-track. He learned that it was unfinished because of lack of funds. All of his old love of horses and racing returned; moreover, he was visited by an ambition to become a man of business, even though in a small way.

Due to luck rather than skill in play, he had two thousand dollars, which he immediately invested in the Chickasee County Fair Association, Incorporated. Without waiting for dividends, he secured a position in Hofer's Feed and Livery Stable, and inquired where he might find something to eat and rustle up a game. He was directed to a place where he might kill two birds and wound another with one stone—the Golconda.

And it was there that he first saw her.

Mr. Carter's experiences with women were limited to one class—adventuresses of the lower order, confidence women, and keepers of gambling houses—in short, the lower class. Marge's beauty and friendliness captivated him. He had been in town less than a day; but already, with the acquisition of property and the friendly chatter of such a girl, he was beginning to feel respectable. Almost prominent.

When he could eat no more, and had no excuse for staying longer, he called for his check. Marge drifted over to him from another table, where she was engaged in sprightly repartee with some newcomers.

"Come again—Jack," she invited.

"Betcher life I will, kid," vowed Mr. Carter.

And true to his word, he did. Many times. Julius had been absent seven nights, six of which Mr. Carter had been very much present. And now, as Julius readjusted his tie and slicked back his hair in front of the gate, Jack brushed by him, knocked and was admitted into Marge's presence.

"Well, I'll be— Say! What do you think of that? No, I'm no fool, of course. I'm a genius for sense, I am," Julius muttered.

This time Julius remained away two weeks. Then he went back. It hurt his pride to divide his time with a rival—and



such a rival! Julius mentally denounced him as a tough-neck, drunkard, gambler, and bum, and his characterization was not far from right. But divided time with any old rival was better than no time at all. He had lost half of his self-respect and all of his self-control. He couldn't stay away from No. 7 Courland Street.

### III.

WEEKS passed; summer approached; the school year was drawing to a close. There was a municipal election in May, in which the reform element put out a ticket to correct the flagrant abuses of decency and order rampant in the city. Ordinarily Julius would have taken an active part in such an election, but now he could feign only a lukewarm interest. When the Reforms won out, with playing bands and flying colors, he was surprised at his own apathy.

With troubles of his own, and the additional bother of commencement week, he had no eyes for the occurrences around him. Neither had many others. But occurrences there were—not so important of themselves as of signs and omens of what was to follow.

A few of the wary and prophetic claimed to have noticed about this time that the small Chinese population, numbering two families and an unattached laundryman, had folded their tents and silently stolen a half-carload of laundry and away. Following their nocturnal departure, the Jews began a silent, wholesale journey to fresh fields and pastures new. What it all meant was afterward explained by these same retroactive prophets with a proverb about rats and doomed ships.

Such was the status of things on the last day of commencement, when Julius walked down to the court-house to draw his final check. On Main Street he met a messenger-boy inquiring the way to No. 7 Courland Street.

"For Miss Strange?" Julius asked suspiciously.

The boy produced from his cap a yellow envelope of the telegraph company, which confirmed Julius's guess.

"She's not at home," he informed the

messenger; "you'll find her at the Golconda restaurant."

On the way to the court-house he revolved the matter of the telegram in his mind without arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. Several teachers were ahead of him, and while waiting for his pay he had ample leisure to listen to the court-house gossip. The law-and-order mayor had taken his seat with his law-and-order council, and therewith was a tale in the making. Julius, as sympathizer and one-time coworker, was let in on a sensational secret.

He left the court-house hurriedly. His face wore a tense, anxious look, but it attracted no attention: faces of that kind were beginning to make their appearance in Nebo City.

At almost the same spot where he had met the messenger-boy a few minutes since, he ran squarely into his uncle, the president of the Acme Refractories Company. He appeared no less agitated than Julius.

"Where have you been?" Old John Laidlaw grasped his nephew's arm roughly. "I've been looking for you everywhere—I must have a word with you."

"In a minute, uncle," said Julius, trying to disengage himself. "I'm in a hurry now."

"So am I. It's to your interest—"

"In a minute, uncle." With one wrench Julius rudely detached himself from his uncle's grasp and headed down the street.

"I'll be back immediately," he called back over his shoulder.

Straight as a bee to its hive he went to the Golconda. Marge, dressed for the street, was talking to the proprietor. Julius called her to the door.

"Are you going to work to-night?" he asked.

"Why, I—I don't know. Why?"

"Don't."

"Don't?"

"I see you'll have to be told, Marge," he panted. "But stay away from here to-night. They—the new officers—are going to raid this place to-night."

Marge suppressed an exclamation. Quickly controlling her amazement, she asked:

"What's that got to do with me?"

"What—to do—with you? Why, they're raiding this place this evening. They'll arrest everybody found here. They'll arrest you."

"What will they arrest me for? What have I done?"

Slowly her indignation caught fire and the floodgates of her speech were opened.

"So that's what you think of me—that I—that I'm not a good woman!" Anger and tears strove for mastery in her voice. "What if they do sell whisky and play cards up-stairs? I've never been up there in my life. My business is to wait on the tables down here."

"You misunderstand me, Marge," he tried to explain.

"No, I don't. You've doubted me from the first—you always have. Oh, I remember all your cute little lectures to elevate me into the Pharisee class of Pembroke, Massachusetts. But I didn't want to live in Psalms and Emerson and walk *so-so*. I wanted to *live*. And you thought I was bad—*bad*, and you would reform me."

"Marge, you misunderstood me entirely. I meant—"

"And Jack Carter," she went on, "is just as bad the other way. He wasn't born in Pembroke, Massachusetts; he was born in a stable, and drank beer for milk. He's drunk more whisky and been to more fights than you've ever been to prayer meeting, but he thinks I'm a lady. He thinks I'm a thousand times better than what I am."

"I'm disappointed in both of you. I'm not an angel or a—lost woman. I'm just human. I don't want to be always weighed against New England school-ma'ams and women of the underworld. I wanted—but what's the use? You wouldn't understand in a thousand years."

To say that Julius was amazed does little justice to the state of his mind. He had never dreamed that Marge was capable of such eloquence.

"You're all wrong, Marge. If you'll let me come over, I'll explain to-night."

"Not to-night."

"Yes, to-night—please. I'll be leaving for home next week. Doesn't that mean anything to you, Marge?"

"All right; come if you wish," she stated listlessly, as if that were the easiest way out of it. Then, turning back to the proprietor, she left Julius standing alone near the door, feeling very much like a self-made fool.

Forgetting all about his engagement with his uncle, he walked off in the opposite direction. His main concern was to pass the time till night, and to that end he went to the library with the purpose of burying himself in the enchanting pages of Buckles's "History of Civilization." Later he walked to the river and then slowly encompassed the town. The hours were leaden winged and unbelievably weary.

In the course of his walks he came upon many nervous, anxious faces, but he saw them not. When a friend stopped him and asked:

"Did you know that the rolling-mill failed to meet its pay-roll to-day?" he replied absently:

"That so?"

"Yes, it was a thunderbolt; everybody thought the mill was prosperous. I had a tip months ago that the ore was of an inferior quality; and when the Chinese began leaving a while back, I said, 'Look out—rats will quit a doomed ship.'"

"Very likely," Julius agreed, and walked on. The troubled faces that everywhere stared blankly into his troubled him not at all. Blocking the sidewalks stood groups of men, talking, swearing, gesticulating angrily; and sometimes the strident voices of women added a new note to the discord. If Julius had listened he might have learned that there was a run on one of the banks that afternoon, and that the depositors in all of them were in a panic of fear.

"I'm not such a cad as she thinks I am," he said under his breath.

And then:

"Hell or no hell, I'll marry her to-night!"

Whether by chance or dint of habit, his walk led him past No. 7 Courland Street. The windows were dark and the tiny apartment showed no signs of habitation.

At the restaurant door he paused instinctively. The day had been long, and something of the nervous dread and high



tension through which he had been passing for hours had communicated itself to him. Even before looking, he knew that Marge was not there. One glance inside confirmed his worst fears.

His rival, Jack Carter, came blundering out. Seeing Julius, he assumed an air of nonchalance.

"Hey, perfessor, we're in the same boat, ol' boy," he giped.

"In the same boat?" Julius repeated in bewilderment.

"That's what. Didn't you hear the news—that Marge is married?"

"Married?"

"That's what. What d'you think I'm doin'—givin' you lessons in English? You needn't say it over after me, but Marge married that man she's been writin' to up in Kentucky. Got a telegram to-day that he was comin', an' at five o'clock they was married an' on their way back to the ol' Kentucky home."

"Did she have a mother?" Julius ventured idiotically.

"Sure; the ol' lady went with 'em."

Julius immediately left for his rooms. He wanted to be alone, to try to collect his thoughts and try to study things out for himself.

His little temporary haven, with its bits of odd, antique furniture, choice books and home pictures, had never seemed so alluring. He was therefore disappointed to find his uncle waiting for him: he so wanted to be left absolutely alone.

"Don't take it so hard, Julius, my boy," the uncle said kindly. "I might have saved you if you had come with me when I asked you; but I suppose that, like the rest of us, you were too excited to act sanely. Of course you know it's too late now."

"Of course."

"We'd been getting money from one of the banks, but something about the rolling-mill leaked out, and there was a run on the bank this afternoon. It so happened that this was the day we *had* to have money, and it put us on the blink.

"I regret it exceedingly, Julius. I don't know how Agatha will take it; but I did what I thought best for your interests. Anyway, we're left in the same boat."

"That's what Jack Carter said."

"Jack Carter?" The old man looked at his nephew quizzically and moved his chair nearer the door.

"Of course," he resumed, "from the nature of my office, I saw the handwriting on the wall first, and if you had come back to me this afternoon when you promised, I could have found a buyer for your twenty shares."

"I don't understand you, uncle," said Julius, with his first faint gleam of intelligence.

"Don't understand? What have I been talking about? Perhaps you can understand that you have just lost two thousand dollars—*two thousand dollars*, buried without hope of resurrection in that brick plant and in clay and rock mines. Do you get that?"

"Oh, darn the money," Julius sighed wearily, and rose and left the room.

On the street, however, the money played a minor part in his disordered, chimerical fancies. But it was not so much the money, after all, as the sense of lost illusions, futility, the death of a great hope. He had hoped to see Nebo City grow up into a mighty metropolis around his property, with sky-scrapers, oil wells, huge stone mansions, a university, and acres and acres of municipal parks. And now, within a few weeks or months, it would be dead as old Carthage, and without her glory!

The romance of his life was over. In the egotism of youth, he could not conceive that at some future time he would love and venture and exult and despair again; that there were other fortunes to be made and lost, and other Marges to laugh with and at him and marry other men.

As a faithful dog returning to the old home of his dead master, he went once more to the birth and death place of his first romance. To any other observer the Golconda would have appeared the same: the same rickety tables, with their whitish table cloths; the same bantering, noisy diners; the same (almost the same) merry, white-aproned waitresses. But to Julius—what a difference! What a world of emptiness was crowded between the four walls!

Across the counter he called for whisky.

There was not a drop in the house: his timely warning had seen to that. A few minutes later he emerged from a blind alley with the remnants of a quart bottle in his possession.

His sensations were peculiar but highly pleasurable. A delicious warmth and tingling raced through his veins and enveloped his whole body. Only in the dim borderland between sleep and waking had he ever experienced such an exquisite state of being. And yet all his senses were awake—keenly awake.

It was a different Julius who walked for the last time the streets of the dying Nebo City. But to Julius it was no longer Nebo City, nor was it dying nor even sick. It was Bagdad or Samarkand or ancient Thebes, and it was pervaded with a subdued radiance blended of all the colors, from the great Northern Lights to the gorgeous hues of tropical sunsets. The light that never was on land or sea enveloped it like a luminous cloud.

Past kiosks, pyramids, and pagodas he went, even to the market-place of the Great Bazaar, and there entered to buy presents for his little nephew in Massachusetts, U. S. A. His selection comprised just the things that a healthy, normal American of six years would most enjoy. In one hand he carried a Teddy bear and an air-gun, and with the other he pulled a child's wagon.

At a street corner he surprised a small group of people, who strangely saw nothing unusual in his appearance. But Julius could not return the compliment. He was in that ecstatic stage that recognizes no boundaries of time and space; and three continents and a hundred centuries greeted his gaze. Fakirs from Hindu temples, white-headed viziers, sheiks, Pharaohs and their daughters, cadis, califs, caitiffs, and others whose titles he could not remember, made up the medley convention on the edge of the path.

One, a composite of a whirling and a howling dervish, whirled around before his audience and talked incessantly. Julius caught a few scattered remarks of the harangue, as "defaulter," "wholesale robbery," and "a pound of flesh nearest the

heart," which suggested stories of the brotherhood of thugs and human sacrifice. At first the dervish turned slowly, but presently he turned faster and faster, till Julius's head began to swim at the sight of him.

"Not so fast, brother—not so fast," Julius cried with concern.

His warning was misunderstood and resented, and he had a realistic sensation of falling through the crowd, with the smell of blood in his nostrils. But one cannot stand or fall alone, and inadvertently he carried with him a small boy, an empty baby-carriage and a yelping dog. Before rising he looked around. His fall might have been measured by seconds, but it had transformed the Oriental priest and his medley of followers into a common variety of the genus *homo Americanus*.

He reached for his hat, rose, and proceeded down the street. In the confusion of his fall he had exchanged hats with the small boy with whom he collided, which hat now perched precariously on the top of his head. For some time the wagon had been pulling with difficulty. Looking back, he saw that he had a passenger—a small, red-headed, pug-nosed urchin.

"Hello!" Julius called blankly. "Who are you?"

The boy grinned, but made no reply. Julius went on. Immediately forgetting about the boy, he satisfied his need for self-expression by singing. For all his choir practise, his was not a particularly musical or tractable voice, but he spared it not:

"I wish I waz a little bird,  
I'd f-fly to the top of a tree,  
And there I'd shing a shad little shong:  
'Nobody cares for me.

"'Nobody cares for me,  
Nobody cares for me.'"

Julius liked the song, and he liked his voice. Tears came into his eyes as the tender sentiment of the ditty seeped into his groggy soul. In another verse he pined to be

" . . . a little bird . . .  
And swim to the bottom of the sea."

there to sing his dolorous song. Then he



branched out to variations, of which there might be as many as there are living creatures and elements, and ended with a more particular desire to be a little canary bird.

He was having trouble in selecting a place for the little canary bird to go—a poetical spot to rime with the sad refrain, when he met Mr. Hoskins, an elder in the church and chairman of the board of trustees of Nebo City Academy. He read disapproval in Mr. Hoskins's eyes.

"'S all ri', Mr. Hoskins, I do," said Julius. "I wish for anything. I'd ruther be a pirate than a damn school-teacher."

"You didn't know my Great-gran'father Schwindell, I shuppose? He's dead. Died o' dropsy. Dead an' buried. He wash educated for preacher, graduate of college an' all that, like me, an' engage' to marry fine ol' girl of fine ol' Boshton fam'ly. Daughter of bishop. It meant shocial and 'cleshiastic prestige for my great-gran'father."

"One night he dhrank lil glass of whisky by mishtake—think of that!—thought it wash min'ral water—an' married the bartender's daughter an' ran off to sea. My Aunt Agatha shays I'm my own great-gran'father."

With which gratuitous information he went his way. Farther down the street the wagon turned over, spilling his passenger, who began to cry and set up some kind of a howl about a hat. Julius honored the boy with one retrospective glance and pursued his course. His purpose was to attend a dance, and to that end he kept eyes and ears alert. And immediately, as if the gods were listening for his whims, the sound of music came to him from a side street.

Directing his steps thither, he climbed some steps and stood in the door of a church. He was not looking for a church. In his befuddled state of mind it seemed that he had done nothing all his life but attend divine services. Nevertheless he remained.

The sermon was over and the minister was calling penitents to the "mourners' bench." While the audience stood and sang "There is a Fountain Filled With

Blood," the evangelist exhorted and called sinners to repentance. A few went forward, and devout church-workers scattered through the audience, urging their untegenerate friends to the front.

Hardly was one song finished till the audience started another; and "Throw Out the Life-Line," "There's a Great Day Coming," and "Is Your Heart Right With God?" flooded the little church. And all the time the man of God appealed to sinners on the uncertainty of life, the fear of everlasting hell, and the love of Christian mothers.

One old lady, loved throughout the town for her gentleness and goodness of heart, began to shout. The congregation was moved. Wet faces appeared everywhere; other voices were raised.

Of a sudden the mourners' bench began to fill. One man standing near Julius was convicted of his depravity and started forward. Somewhere Julius had seen that face before—had seen it when it was not penitent and not drenched with tears. Then he placed it in the right niche of memory.

Yes; he was sure of it, though he could hardly believe the evidence of his senses. He was drunk, he knew, but not so drunk that he couldn't see. Nor was it the work of fancy, however improbable and unreal it all might seem.

He could doubt no longer: it was Jack Carter. And while he looked, Jack, sobbing brokenly and bowed under the weight of a thousand generations of sin, stumbled forward and fell on his knees before the altar of mercy.

"Hit him pretty hard—about the girl an' hish money. Like me," Julius communed with himself as he turned away. "He thought she wash an angel, an' I thought maybe— Well, both of us had to cel'brate, an' it wouldn't be any cel'bration at all—nozzin new at all—for him to get drunk or me to go to church."

"Thash ri', Jackey, ol' boy; go 'head an' get religion—I've already got it."

And pulling the overturned wagon behind him, like a recalcitrant pup to a leash, he stumbled once more into the street singing his little song.

# Blue Flames

by Ethel and James Dorrance

Authors of "Scalps to the Brave," etc.

## WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ARRIVING in Dismal Gap, North Carolina, whither he had come to fight the drink habit at the suggestion of Sylvia Brainard and Spencer Pope, collector of internal revenue, Calvin Parker, artist, met Verney Metcalf, mountain beauty, put up at Plott's Hotel, and immediately found himself suspected as a "revenuer." North Carolina as a State had gone bone dry, and after an unsuccessful effort to deport him on the part of Asa Simms and Rex Currie, of the wet forces, the latter in love with Verney, Calvin attended a secret meeting of the drys, headed by Colonel Dryden, who offered for Parker's use a shack on Fallaway Rim. The drys had also mistaken Parker for a revenue officer.

Suddenly the light went out and some missile thudded against the wall; flaming letters appeared thereon, but after a brief panic Parker discovered this to be luminous paint, and with one of the men for helpers dug their way out of the downfall of rock caused by an explosion engineered by the wets. It appeared that the missile had been a bullet from Currie's rifle, which was equipped with a silencer.

Later, after Calvin's meeting with old Tom Metcalf, Verney's father and the leader of the wets, following Parker's occupancy of the cabin on Fallaway Rim, at the Metcalf house, Old Tom continually muttered of blue flames. A warning as to Parker from Asa Simms, delivered by Rex Currie, precipitated a furious argument, which ended, despite Rex's opposition, in her father's decision that Verney should shadow the supposed revenuer, who, after buying a horse, again met the girl, who displayed a surprising knowledge of painting, criticising his canvas after neatly drilling it at the edges with her rifle.

Following old Tom to a cabin in the woods, Parker saw him fondling something which ran through his fingers like drops of liquid fire. He was reminded of the words of Tobe Riker, the stage-driver, to Verney—his mysterious allusion to certain "hellish blue flames" in which Metcalf was interested. Now the old man addressed them in soliquy, saying:

"Blue flames, you've got the power I crave—you can open the world to my gal."

Parker slipped, lurched forward into the window-frame. He found himself cruelly wedged as though forced into a strait-jacket.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### HIS CUT-BACK.

ON raising his head he found his predicament pointed by the round mouth of a rifle barrel. Despite the undoubted surprise of his appearance on the scene, the hands which held the weapon were steady. In the shifty torch-light Old Tom's face showed to be twisting with fury.

"Hell's banjer—the slick!" he cried. "Stop wrenching—you can't heft loose. What be you-uns hunting this P.M.? Do you call me bird, beast or fish? You hear me asking of you. Best be thinking quick or I—" The tightening of rifle-aim completed his suggestion.

Parker ceased his struggles to be free from the vise into which his awkwardness had flung him, advised by the point of the gun.

"Let me explain my position, Mr. Metcalf."

"'Pears to me that don't need no explaining."

"But it does, sir; rather, the incentive that got me into this somewhat tight place. You folks around here have a mistaken idea of me. I am seeking liquor, yes; but for my own use. I am able and willing to pay well for—"

"You'll pay, by cripes!"

The blond patriarch's interruption was an angry roar.

This story began in *The Argosy* for May 10.



"I'd ought to make you pay this minute, by right, for spying on—on—" He glanced back at the hearth, innocent of lard pail, of mysterious flames, of the cobblestone taken from the chimney-back. Marvelously swift had been his restoration at first hint of alarm. His expression was less fierce as he returned to the window's prisoner. "But there's smarter than what I am on your trail. You'll get yourself run outen these parts, I reckon, without my man-killing you."

"I reckon I won't, if you have any justice in your system. This mountainside isn't your property, anyhow, is it?" Parker protested, the while guardedly working one shoulder upward.

The effect of the question upon the old man was unnerving. The rifle again raised and a steady eye squinted along its barrel.

"What's it you say?" he bellowed. "I ain't never been no man-killer, but I'll start with you, if you pester me with another question. 'Tain't a matter of whose land this is—you got no right prowling over it. If you wriggle your right side down instead of up you can heft loose. The winder's warped atop—has been plumb squaw-wifted ever since the Bald's last conniption fit."

Parker found these instructions practical. Loosened from the grip of the slanted frame, he turned to urge his contested explanations upon the mountaineer.

But in the same split-minute two disconcerting things occurred. The flare went out and a bullet tore through the soft crown of his fedora—he felt the press of it lift his hair.

"That means you git and stay git!" amplified a ravening voice from the pitch-black inside.

Under all circumstances this appealed to Calvin Parker as sensible advice.

The man from "out North" was unprepared for the advent of the annual blackberry-blossom storm. Some time during the night the winds had marshaled their heaviest storm-clouds in the sky; by day-break were driving a slantwise deluge that made the trees writhe, and beat down completely fern and bush. Already the creek

could be heard lashing about in attempts to escape punishment. From the makeshift shelter behind Teetotaler sounded an occasional snorted protest.

Smoking a pipe just inside the open front doorway, the shut-in watched the spectacle with equivocal interest and dismay. In time, however, the fantastic shapes of the cloud battalion, the kaleidoscopic tints in the shrapnel of rain, the poor spirit—or was it wisdom—of the growing things that offered no resistance grew monotonous. He closed both doors and lit the candles.

When the fire cheered up, he set himself, with what skill he could summon, to the manufacture of an omelette which, in view of the energy expended in fluffing and flapping it, ought to have tempted his appetite. But it was sad as the day. It oozed futile tears. He grew disgusted with it as he partook of it.

He plumped both elbows upon the table and at last permitted himself to brood. The fact that his eyes were gazing straight at Sylvia's latest, framed in a purple leather stand, gave license for this lapse from cheer.

Cause enough for a man to brood—looking at Sylvia's picture—the man who was away! Why had he not appreciated her rarity in time to save himself this torture-cure? The only possible excuse he could think of was that from childhood he had grown used to Sylvia. When had he not been leashed by a preference for her, from the little-boyhood days when her fairy-princess fluff of silver hair had always been waving like the banner of a knight just ahead of him; through the college vacations, when he had found her a débutante, with sentiment beginning to make mystery in her violet eyes; after his return from the dissipations and art struggles under the tutelage of French masters, when her fragile loveliness and reserve of manner had roused him to a protectorate not felt in any of his crasser, Latin-quarter affairs.

On that culminative "varnishing day" at the Academy, when he was paid tribute as "perhaps the most promising of our younger American artists," it had seemed fitting that his triumph should be a portrait of Sylvia as the one whitest lily-of-the-valley, gleaming from a vague, fanciful

background of many of the same—not one so elusive, so exotically sweet as she.

His technique had been mentioned as inspired—but inspired, as he had acknowledged, both to himself and to Sylvia by his lifetime of looking at her. Their engagement had been the most natural development in the world, approved by the two families and society. That it had developed into a long one had been tacitly understood by every one to be a punishment for his growing self-indulgence with the cup.

Once, in the reaction after a conspicuous social *contretemps*, he had pointed that marriage might “brace him up.” For the first time she had mentioned her jealousy of his habit. Wine was her rival, she acknowledged prettily. Until he had worn out the other love, she dared not trust herself to him. She was content to wait. Time enough to settle down, she had declared, after both had had their fling. So the days and months, even years, had piled upon each other until—

Parker’s elbows straightened along the deal table; his chin continued heavy in his hands; his cheek flattened against the boards in the prostration of his memories.

The shack was stuffy from the fire, thick with tobacco smoke, unpleasantly odorous from spent candles and cookery. One after another the lights went out. The wet logs on the hearth succeeded at last in spitting out the fire. With darkness Calvin Parker fell into an unhappy dose.

Some one laid violent hands upon his shoulders, shook him to an unsteady stand. He muttered resentfully and stared about. He was in his own studio, where he had been the last he remembered. The old-gold walls with their frames of brown-and-bronze, the pet Persian rugs, the costly this and that fancied in his travels—all were recognizable.

Then, too, it was Spencer Pope, his closest friend, who had acted as alarm-clock. He mumbled a recognition of this fact as he shambled over to one of the windows that overlooked the park and threw it up for air. When he faced again toward the huge, beautiful room; he pressed both

hands against his temples, which were throbbing.

“What a head!” he murmured, not complainingly, but as one states the infliction of an undeserved ill. “Last night must have been some night—*some* night!”

Disapproval, dark upon Pope’s face, gave edge to his tone.

“Why, on the eve of the most important day in your career, couldn’t you have let the trouble-stuff alone? You’re in fine fettle, aren’t you, to show your winter’s work to the world this afternoon? Of course your personal appearance and habits won’t influence the experts and critics, but it will the fashionables, from whom your future commissions must come. You look like a poster of ‘A Night Out.’ For Sylvia’s sake, you might have held in until your exhibition tea was over.”

Parker tried a jaunty air, only to realize its failure.

“Had every intention of doing so,” he defended. “Forgot my lunch in the varnishing of those two new portraits until too late to get it served here. Taxied down to the Van Vliet for a bite. Only had two or three to rest up on and a lone little bottle with my smelts and tartar. I’d have been all right if a bunch of those velvet-coats and cropped-hair ‘partners’ hadn’t dropped in. They’re always so overpoweringly cordial with a chap who has cash enough in pocket to pay the checks. I was billed to take Sylvia to the opera and had to dress, so I guess I must have been pretty late getting back up-town.”

“You were,” Pope nodded with grim effect. “At nine o’clock last night she telephoned for me.”

“For you—why for you, Spence?”

“A queen wants some courtier dangling around the throne steps. Sylvia asked me to fill in—to take your place, as it were.”

A smile was on the deputy collector’s good-looking face, a rather strange smile, partly of self-depreciation and partly of—could it be triumph? Parker noticed it and paused a moment to ponder, then promptly gave it up. Let good old Spence smile, if he could; how did it matter just what he was smiling over?

“Went alone to the Winter Palace and



afterward to supper at Fred's. Don't remember much after that. Since the morning-after face of that clock says it's noon, I must have got somewhere home in the late earlies."

Pope continued to smile that strange smile of his.

"And by the early lates—to be exact, by three o'clock this afternoon," he said, "you have to be in form to receive the super-ultras of the art set and their self-tagged devotees!"

At this Parker managed mirth-sounds of some buoyancy.

"Don't look so sour about it, friend mentor. The four portraits are varnished, I tell you—finished to the last hair of the last eyebrow."

"But, Cal, if you could see yourself! You look like—"

Parker waved a soothing hand. "My boy, do you think Mrs. Millionbucks Pembroke is going to hold my looks against me when she sees herself in oils of my spreading, admired by all her crowd? Or Captain Mayflower Hannah, or old Mortgage-on-the-World Flint, or my own lily-of-the-valley lady?"

"Don't class Sylvia with your other sitters," Pope objected. "Sometimes, Cal, you seem positively odious in your cast-iron assurance that nothing you do can affect her good opinion."

"Of course I'm no fit object for a fiancée's eyes just now, Spence, but by that third early-late I'll be—well, an expurgated edition. Give me ten minutes under the shower, a once-over shave, a jolt of rye, my breakfast, and a pipe— While I set about working the miracle, won't you give downstairs a ring for a grape-fruit, *sans* sugar; a pot of black coffee; three two-minute eggs; a flock of unbuttered toast—that's a good fellow?"

Parker started for the annex to the studio proper that held his living quarters. At the door he paused and interrupted his friend's grudging manipulation of the telephone.

"Strange," he remarked, "that I should be wearing this smock! I've often got up fully dressed, but never before in a smock. Wonder why in Sam Hill—"

"That's all—and hurry it, please."

He heard the finish of Pope's order before turning on the water. On turning it off he heard the finish of what evidently had been a second call upon the wire.

"The sooner the better for both him and you. But I want you to see him at his worst—you ought to know why. Yes, I'll wait—until seeing you, then."

He did not understand until later. Even then he did not quite see why Spencer, his friend, had taken the initiative, should want his fiancée to see him "at his worst."

When he presently emerged into the studio he felt somewhat better, and the critical deputy expressed himself as amazed by the transformation. Then, too, Sylvia looked exceptionally beautiful as she swept in, earlier than he could have hoped, but dressed for the exhibition tea. Small, fragile of figure, yet aglow with health, dainty as dawn in her blush-rose crape, she divided her greetings, her inquiries, her wavery smiles between the two men.

Humility overtook Parker that he should be allowed to look at anything so fresh and fragrant after the chaotic depths of last night. Sylvia always seemed the more desirable after a debauch with his "other love." He longed to kiss the lips that were so tolerant of his fault, but, with Pope present, touched only her finger-tips. That, he felt, was much more than he deserved.

Sylvia was seldom demonstrative, having been reared to the idea that it was enough for her to be; but an exclamation of relief escaped her at his appearance.

"You don't look half as bad as Spence—that is, as I expected—not *half*!"

Her reproachful glance at their "mutual friend" renewed Parker's uneasiness over the telephonic fragment he had overheard.

"He's braced up wonderfully in the last hour, as you would appreciate had you arrived when I did," Pope declared. "If you and I are up to police duty, I guess the tea can be pulled off. I've just called up the florist, the caterer, and the musicians—it seems that Cal neglected none of the preliminaries. Everything and body is on the way."

"I'm so relieved! You gave me something of a shock, Spence, and I do dislike to hurry." She settled in a wing-chair at one

side the fireplace, her face lighting exquisitely beneath the large black velvet hat she wore. She lifted her purplish eyes to Parker's.

"Cal," she said quietly, "you know I never have wished to interfere with what should be your own affair, but Spencer thinks you are getting more or less hopeless on the liquor question. You kept me waiting last night without a word of explanation, and all the telephone booths in New York at your service. If it hadn't been for Spence, I'd have—"

"I'm sorry, dear—I'll find some way to make it up to you," Parker interrupted. "But even Spencer Pope hasn't any right to call a man hopeless who does his work before he plays. When you see the way I glorified the Pembroke battle-ax yesterday, you'll understand that I was working at high tension—that in a way I had earned a reaction. And an effect of transparency which I got into the lily leaves came from last-minute inspiration. You can't work like that and plod like a dray-horse afterward. Don't scold me for falling until you have seen the height from which I fell. Suppose we have a preview of the portraits before the rest arrive?"

She glanced from lover to friend, her unwonted effort at severity already weakened.

Pope, seeing this, arose impatiently and strode to the window. From a stand there he turned, frowning, to inspect the "defense."

Assuming a briskness which physically, at least, he did not feel, Parker sauntered over to the cord which controlled the purple silk sheet before "The Lady of Lilies," already famed as his masterpiece. He drew upon it tenderly, yet with confidence, for, best of anything he had done, he loved this conception of the woman he loved. He did not look at the canvas in its wide, flat frame of green gold-leaf. His eyes glanced hopefully at Pope's stern face, then settled upon Sylvia's to await the reward of her appreciation of what he hoped was a master-touch.

As the curtain clumped on one side the frame he heard his friends' commingled stutter of amaze, saw the girl's jewel-glittering hand clutch the arm of the wing-

chair, lift her to her feet, give her a forward impulse. He had expected her to be surprised and pleased, but this emotion—her gasp of astonishment, the sudden flush that stained her pure coloring, her trembling, as if she were about to swoon—

She stopped half-way across the floor space, a look of horror stiffening her face. One hand wavered upward and covered her face, the other pointed forward. Half the sob of a child, half the wail of a woman, her accusation lifted.

"What—*what* have you done?"

"What have I done?"

"You've done it, all right!" Was it triumph that had sounded in Pope's voice as he hurried to the girl and half-carried her back to her chair.

Her face sank into both hands. She began to sob.

Fear, unidentified but cruel, clutched at Parker's heart. He strode into the center of the room and turned to face his masterpiece. One glance sent him reeling backward, as he never had reeled when in his cups.

Whence had come this blight upon his gentle fantasy?

Each leaf and lily of the background, which had been but shadows of suggestion, stood forth in offensive detail, wilted and partially decayed. Each feature of the central flower-face had been mutilated until all sweetness of expression was gone—forehead and nose lengthened, eyes bleared with a look of craft, lips curled with superciliousness, chin weakened. The silver hair, that had shimmered like pale sunlight, now suggested fibrillated ice. Frost had browned and shrunk the sheaf of green-leaf satin from which her shoulders rose. The virgin busts, into which such a feeling of reverence had been painted, were flattened into an unlovely thinness. Through the illusion gathered modestly over the heart, a jagged, ugly spot could be discerned, in its center a gnawing worm.

The picture remained a portrait, but one ravished by brutal brushes into a powerful caricature.

From the chair into which he had collapsed, Parker studied the details of this travesty on the most exquisite woman he



knew. When able, he glanced around at Sylvia and Pope.

The girl lifted her face and returned his look, her lips opening, as if to speak, but uttering no sound. The man looked disgusted, yet alert—looked to be thinking hard.

"As you know, I was out all last night," said Parker in a lagging voice. "Some one must have broken in."

"You have an enemy—perhaps a rival artist?" faltered Sylvia.

Parker did not answer. A sudden perception prevented him. His eyes had followed the deputy's to where the smock which he had awakened wearing lay huddled on the floor of his dressing-room. Upon a tabourette in a far corner his palette lay. He remembered having cleaned it yesterday afternoon. He sprang across the room to examine it. It was covered with paint, in daubs and small coils. The tubes near-by showed to have been emptied with a twist that was peculiarly his own.

With hands shaking from what might have been either memory or prescience, he exposed the remaining three portraits of the collection selected for private exhibit that afternoon. All had been maltreated by the brutal brush. That of the wealthy Mrs. Pembroke, who had wished posterity to remember her comparative slenderness of fifteen years ago, now showed the triple chins of to-day, had lost all figure-lines in balloonlike inflations. Horns distinguished the brow of Captain Hannah, and lust drew back his lips, both indelicate tributes to his wide-known reversion from the Puritanism of the ancestors he boasted. Flint, Wall Street magnate, had been remade by a few imaginative strokes into a specimen of the chosen, whose blood he denied the more indignantly because it really flowed in his veins.

Diabolically was exaggerated every weak point of those who had paid so high a price that the benefit of every doubt of them might be perpetuated in oils!

The artist reached his own verdict, stupefying, but positive. He spoke the culminating catastrophe.

"I must—have done it—myself."

With the quiet of desperation he faced

the two he considered his closest and dearest friends. He forced himself to draw up words from the well of bitterness within him.

"I don't remember anything about it, so I must have been very drunk. To you, Sylvia, I don't know what to say, except that it was my other self that has sinned against you in ruining the portrait you sat for so patiently. I am sorry and ashamed to the last fiber of my worthless self. I will pay the price as best I can—will do whatever you say."

She answered his despair with despair of her own.

"But nothing you can ever pay will save my lovely picture—save you and me to-day!"

"I didn't know," remarked Pope, "that cartooning was in your line."

"Only when drunk," acknowledged the recreant gloomily. "It was my first offering to art—got me expelled from Yale. The *Jester* printed some sketches I had made of the faculty when on a spree. Caution has managed my subconsciousness since, until to-day—"

"Yes, to-day," Pope interrupted, taking out his watch.

"What can we do about to-day?" mourned Sylvia.

Parker heard the tones of subdued discussion with which the deputy talked to his fiancée from the consultation into which he had drawn her; heard fragments of their plan to declare him suddenly ill, to "call off" the tea as best they might, heard Sylvia pleading against something which Spence had urged. He did not wish to know until they were ready to tell him. He did not care much what they decided. He had promised to abide by their decision, whatever it was; no matter which of them had originated it; and he would.

"And this was it!"

The exile in the cabin on Fallaway Rim spoke aloud for company. Lifting the shoulders that remained broad-built despite misuse of himself, he peered through the gloom. He fancied, rather than saw the photographic eyes of Sylvia Brainard bent with pitying encouragement upon him.

"God help me!" he groaned.

And, for the rest of that day, he thirsted no more.

## CHAPTER XV.

### VARMINT FOOL!

THE blackberry storm seems designed by the weather-gods not to destroy the mountainscape. Just in time it always relents. Early on the fourth day Sol took a squint over the prospect, gave his clouds a final wringing, then fluttered them out to dry. The wind shook up the growing things. The ground drained the drippings. All nature cheered that the huge wash-day was over. In an hour the sun was beaming steadily from a sky whose azure seemed only deepened by the wrung-out clouds flapping below.

From the door of the shack Parker looked down into the valley, pleased as a house-wife might have been at finding everything cleaned up. Straight across the formerly smudged mountains looked scoured and varnished, as also the blues and grays of the distances, the greens and occasional floral flares of the foreground.

Another thing was clear to him as the day: He had been a week without a drink! Yet where was the virtue of riding "the wagon" if strapped into it? To enjoy his new-found strength he must prove it. Anticipation brightened his face as he stood in the doorway; a gleam lit his eyes, as if reflected from the anticipatory world without. He would change his mind about letting that inhospitable mountain girl interfere. There must be no more beating about the bush; he would appeal directly, as man to man, to old Tom Metcalf, according to his original intention. Truly, faint heart never won anything for anybody—either friends or drinks!

A pair of hounds announced his approach, even before he emerged into the considerable clearing that surrounded the double file of oaks and the pretentious—for the region—Metcalf house. He had left Teetotaler at the ford, that he might seem the more defenseless in this morning call.

He was pleased that the hounds returned his greeting in kind. Always had he been said to have "a way" with dogs. Now, having rushed at him savagely, with bristles upraised, they subsided into a tail-waving, sniff-approving escort.

From a chair on the porch a man descended the steps and stood staring at him from under hand-shaded eyes. Even at the distance Parker recognized the giant figure and leonine head of redoubtable Tom.

Remembrance of the old man's parting advices on their two previous encounters lent interest to this defiance of them. "See to it that you hunt only fur, fin, and feathers," he had said on the road. "Now you git and stay git!" had been the command closing the contretemps at the cabin. The echoed threat of them in Parker's mind gave his greeting suavity.

"Good morning, Mr. Metcalf. I know it's etiquette for a newcomer to wait until the old settlers call on him, but I've been feeling a bit lonely, so here I am."

"Here, you—" For a moment the patriarch continued to stare, his chin thrown up from a chest haired over with red where the flannel shirt was unbuttoned; then he finished sincerely: "Here you be, sure enough; and here I be, plumb gold-dinged!"

"In fact," added Parker, "I'd have been over several days ago, except for the weather."

"Git you out, he-brute!"

Tom's command was startling until understood as addressed to the more importunate of the dogs. His roar at once softened into a conversational tone.

"Come along up the stoop, stranger, and set you a chair."

Parker accepted the invitation with his wonted lazy movements, but his thoughts made up in action. So immediate a concession to "the Parker charm" might be more suspicious than auspicious. "Come along up," had said this lawbreaker who believed him a revenue spy; yet the way he fell in behind would seem to amplify: "I want you ahead of me, so I can watch you."

There was, however, a declaration of square-dealing in the way the mountaineer



strode across the porch to the open door, removed the revolver from his hip, hung it upon a nail in the frame—a nail made significant by the company of other nails.

"I'm not after fur or feathers this morning—I'd have to fling rocks if I were." Such was Parker's comment on this sign of truce.

"I seen that," was the reply.

The "out-Norther" took the sway-back chair indicated, one that faced the door of what evidently was the living-room. The host straddled a straight-backed one against the wall of logs, thereby helping himself to a comprehensive view of the approaches to his habitation. His feral eyes settled upon the lax lounging of the younger man.

"Quite a winding and raining we-all have been suffering."

"Quite is right!" Parker returned this overture with a plunge into the object of his call. "I'd be willing never to meet another blackberry to escape another such storm. There I was, shut up for three days and nights in that windowless shack I've rented, without so much as a drop of liquor to light my thoughts. Honestly, Mr. Metcalf, I'd have given half my year's income for one small bottle of the worst whisky ever bumbled."

The blockader's expression was a triumph, if judged by histrionic standards, its amusement deepening into polite reproof.

"I disgust bad liquor myself."

"Good or bad doesn't matter so much when your tongue is drier than a suction-pump with the feed-pipe out of the well." Parker paused to enjoy his simile. "To tell the end of my sad story first, I'm about desperate for some whisky."

"So we-all have hearn—so we've hearn," chuckled Metcalf.

"You have heard? From whom?"

"My nigger, Cotton Eye, is tolerable talkative. He's told us-uns how the Plotts and Dry Dryden allowed you could happen on some bumbings in the mountains. Wa'n't it Cotton Eye, now, who sent you hoping to Asa Simms? And Sal Shortoff, she gets so boiled up working for the cause that she spills."

"Mrs. Shortoff chose to regard me as a pernicious influence." Secretly somewhat

disconcerted by this array of evidence against him, Parker pursued his course of easy frankness. "Possibly it was to divert my search that she sold me Teetotaler."

Tom Metcalf agreed with a grin. "I wouldn't put it past her."

"The good dame, I also suspect, feared I might share any find with her parched worser half. She seems prohibition bent."

"Sal sure is. She gives in to Bide about as quick as 'lasses runs." His weathered face straightened, his eyes grew serious as they swept the clearing. "No' Carolina, in this day, stranger, ain't the State for a thirsty man. Time was when I had my dram regular, but I've learned to do without."

"You consummate old liar!" That was what Parker thought, wondering just how many stone-throws away was the Metcalf distillery. Aloud he tried a new approach.

"From all I hear, there are many in the Carolinas who don't obey the law to the letter. Along the roads you are likely to happen upon twigs of laurel which point the way to native barrooms."

"So?"

The mountaineer met his visitor's gaze with a look that held no personal interest. It was politely vacuous. In the next breath he changed the subject.

"I'm right sorry you hit on to-day for calling on us-uns, stranger, being as I'm the only one seeable. Miss Emmy, my sister-in-law, who's run the house since my own good woman passed along, drove down to Dismal to buy some store stuff. My gal, Verney, is suffering this morning from the all-overs."

"The all-overs?"

"I reckon you-all would call what she's got a case of nerves. Verney don't have them soon, but when she does she ain't fitten to talk to none, especially a furriner. Sandyred's out with the nigger, planting; Sandy's my man-child. Another day I'd admire to meet him to you. It was powerful common of you-all to make us a call. Likely you'll come again?"

The suggested dismissal of the old man's words and manner Parker chose to disregard.

"To be frank, the object of my visit is a

double one," he said. "The social half of it I'll improve, thanks to your kind invitation, when I may meet the rest of your household. As for the other half—"

He lifted his attention from patting one of the dogs so quickly as to surprise a frown on the face recently masked in dissimulation.

"Mr. Metcalf," he demanded in a voice that snapped, "will you or will you not sell me some whisky?"

With a bang the uptilted forelegs of the patriarch's chair met the floor.

"By cripes, you have got the nerve of—Be you a varmint fool to come here after—I'll show you what I meant when I—"

Each unfinished, these ejaculations spat through his lips.

A sound and sight within the house caught Parker's attention.

From just inside the door, around that side of the frame where sat his host, he saw a long, strong-handed arm extend. A checked gingham skirt fluttered a trifle. The next moment a face appeared—one surrounded by fire-glinting hair.

His eyes met the forbidding, fawn-green ones of Vernaluska Metcalf.

Any impulse to get to his feet, to greet her, was subdued in time by the vehement shake of her head and her significant finger-to-lips. In the seconds he could afford for consideration he saw her possess herself of the revolver which her parent had hung upon the nail as a sign of hospitality. There was no suggestion of all-overs in her rapid movements.

A spell of amazement held Parker. What did she want with the weapon? Would he find it trained upon him from the shadows?

Did she mean, with her own "ornery" hand, to make good the warning that he would not find anything "pleasurable" on Roaring Fork?

## CHAPTER XVI.

PAID BY PROMISE.

WITH return of his outer attention to Old Tom, Parker saw that any immediate outburst from that source was averted. The sudden fury was smoothing

away, the color receding from his face, the angry lips straightening into lines of guile.

"Likely you-all didn't intend to rile me," said the mountaineer, "but you'd best not ask for bumbings again. Naturally I ain't got nary none, account of the law."

A glance within showed Parker an anxious, admonitory face. Yet he persisted toward his goal.

"Far from wishing to rile you, sir, I'd like to confide in you as I would in a friend. There seems to be a report circulating through the region that I'm a revenue officer sent by the government to make trouble for blockaders."

Old Tom's nod was nothing more than admission that he had heard the report.

"This you will realize," the man from the North continued, "to be even more cruel than absurd when you know that I am a man of independent income whose chief fault lies in having partaken too freely of the mead that cheers. I have come to the Blue Ridge to get a grip on my thirst. My presence here this morning, unarmed and unattended, when I've been warned of your suspicions of me, ought to argue for the truth of what I claim."

"It might—and then again it mightn't." The patriarch showed that he was not to be impressed by talk alone.

"Here is my membership in the Satyrs—a famous New York club to which no revenueur could belong. Will you oblige me by looking it over?"

After the mountaineer had scrutinized the credential protected by isinglass on the inside of the card-case extended and had returned it with only a grunt by way of comment, Parker proceeded more boldly.

"You are generally believed, throughout the countryside, Friend Metcalf, to distil a grade of corn whisky which loses nothing of strength or flavor from the fact that it pays no tax to the Federal government. Wait just a minute before you flare up again—hear me through!"

The last exclamation had been drawn out by the glower which the mountaineer had focused upon him.

"Get a lavish with your explanationing, then!"

Parker proceeded to do so, but not before



risking a glance into the living-room. The sight within stirred his heart and voice.

The girl still stood just beyond her father's range of vision with the revolver broken, the cartridges extracted and in her hand. This she showed him as, with significant gesture, she dropped the shells into the pocket of her dress, snapped to the gun, and returned it, harmless, to its nail upon the door frame. Again he noticed that in none of her movements was there sign of that state of nerves under which she was supposed to be suffering.

With a thrill he realized that Vernaluska was not allied against him, rather was acting for him, was safeguarding him against possible untoward impulses of her irascible parent. What a girl she was, he saluted her in thought—what a splendid, resourceful, pally sort of girl!

Metcalf was widely said to be a man of discrimination and fair play, he was meanwhile suavely urging. That was why he had risked the morning visit to his home in the teeth of their past unpleasantness. Was he likely to have come were he really a revenueur? Would he not have tried slinking, underhand methods out of regard for his personal safety?

"There's no safe concluding about revenue slicks, whether or no," the old man drawled, now quite dispassionately. "Some of the cuckolds are right pert of tongue, while others are just fool-cussed."

"Well, sir, I'm neither smart-slick nor fool-cussed, as you'll realize when you know me better," Parker insisted. "The government doesn't know me except for a bit of income tax, and I'll never be a collector. I come to you as a private customer, ready to pay your price. The delivery can take any form you select for your safety until after I've established your confidence. What do you say, sir?"

The mountaineer arose suddenly from the seat which he had been straddling. Parker straightened in his, nerved himself for a possible attack. He glanced toward the nail in the door-frame. Upon it the revolver hung, looking no more innocuous than before it had been robbed. The girl had disappeared.

Enjoyment of the situation surged up in

Parker. He hoped that the wily old law-breaker would make a lunge for the gun, level it upon him, pull the hammer down upon an empty cylinder.

But the attack for which Metcalf had arisen proved not to be one of physical force. After rounding his chair to the porch edge, he flicked a caterpillar off a cluster of geranium-blooms, then turned the chair around, sat down upon it, and very deliberately crossed his legs.

"You-all have got a plumb convincing way of putting things," he remarked. "If what you do was as convincing as what you say—"

A loudening, singing tenor voice interrupted. From around the house the words of the song became distinguishable:

"Feed the furnace and stir the mash;  
Play the ace, you get the hash."

An expectant look soothed the severity of Metcalf's face. "It's Sandyred. Makes them up himself, them songs."

Into view strode the son of the "cantankerous" clan—a replica of what Old Tom must have been as a youth.

"Sandy, this here's Parker from 'out North," said the old man by way of introduction. "Glad you happened along, for he's in a powerful hurry to be moving toward home, and you can show him the short cut to the ford."

"I can that," agreed the youth, with uncomplimentary alacrity.

"What do you think, son," said Tom, with a chuckle; "he came up here hoping to buy popskull! Heard that we Metcalfs made it ag'in' the law!"

"Hell's fire, dad!" The younger actor took an aggressive forward step. "And you're a standing for a charge like that? Let the cuss so much as hint such—"

"Easy, son. He ain't charging nothing; just hankering to feed a thirst, so he says." His voice hardened. "But I'm just telling you, Mr. Parker, we-all know enough about them polite customs you was mentioning not to look forward to another call from you until after we've returned this one of yours."

After expressing the hope that his social overture might soon be returned in kind,

Parker started down the road with Sandy-red. He did not feel altogether cheated of the result of his visit. No matter how rude the mountain girl had been to him, there would be an argument in her favor every time he remembered the appearance of that brown hand and the removal of bullets.

They stopped short in the road. A woman's cry of distress from somewhere in the woods to their right had cut the placid air.

"You'll have to project your own way, stranger. I've got to go!"

With the next breath the youth sprang into the underbrush.

The noise of his departure crackled back to Parker, who hesitated, tempted to follow. But second thought started him again toward the ford. He had "projected" enough for one day. Whatever the cause of alarm, it could be no affair of his. He was contemplating the next move of the liquor quest, some dozen rods down the road, when the thicket parted and Vernaluska Metcalf stumbled down the bank. Her face was flushed, eyes dilated, hair gloriously streaming. Her left hand was pressed against her heart, her right was held behind.

"Miss Metcalf!" cried Parker. "I hope nothing has happened. We heard a scream, and your brother departed like a shot."

"It was mine, that scream—a signal. I've got to make a hustle back," she panted, "and explain that I had an extra bad attack of the all-overs."

"But why the ruse?"

"I wanted to give you—all something unbeknownst to the folks. See what I managed to lug here on the run, dodging Sandy-red."

At sight of what she produced from behind her back he took several hurried steps toward her.

"A jug!" he exclaimed. "For me?"

She nodded. "A gallon jug and full of corn juice. I'd go slow on it if I was a paleface like you-uns. It's a sight more powerful than what you've been used to out North."

The surprise of it, the joy of it, the almost divine relief of it, made Parker well-nigh inarticulate.

"Why, you blessed girl!" he finally managed. "To think that you—how can I ever thank you? Let me relieve you of—"

She stepped back, frowning, the jug again behind her.

"You can't relieve me until you pay—leastwise you can't unless you're the scum that 'd try taking it from me by force. I'd give you a right smart tussle for it, at that."

Parker's advance stopped, his surge of warmth toward her checked by her evident mercenary tendency. His hand sought his ever-ready wallet.

"I'll pay anything the stuff's worth to you," he said.

"Oh, it ain't money that can buy this, so put back your container. It's a promise I want you to pay."

"A promise, Miss Metcalf?"

"Yes, out-Norther, the sort of word-of-honor promise that gents keep or don't make. It is that you take yourself out of this region without delay."

"Take myself out? Would you mind telling me why?"

Vernaluska's eyes flashed. "You must have sight worse than Teetotaler not to see that you're in danger every minute you stay."

"From your father?"

She shook her head. "My father fights fair, but there are them that don't. Rex Currie has reasons of his own for hating you, and he's an enemy to worry any man. I know Rex. He won't give you a chance to fight back. Promise you'll take yourself off, and the jug's yours."

"Guess I'll have to do without my bumblings to-day," said he wearily. "I can't seem to get worried over Rex Currie's dislike, and I may make my own chance to fight back when his attack comes."

"Then"—she hesitated, studying the stubbornness of him—"I'll swap that promise for another. I'll give over the jug if you'll agree never to come to our place again."

"Never come again?" He paused to look into the insistent eyes of her.

More than anything else in the world he wanted that jug. He had not realized the dynamic power of the desire for what it



contained that bad grown in its absence until it was so nearly within his grasp.

There came momentary diversion. Up the road sidled Teetotaler, a broken rein explaining his escape from the bush to which he had been tied. By the time Parker had retrieved his straying mount his decision was made.

"I'll give you my word of honor not to come to see you," he said, "subject to your release of the jug, if you will promise to come to see me at the Fallaway cabin."

The look she returned to his was searching, almost mandatory in its effort to learn his trustworthiness. Then, all unexpectedly, an impish smile dimpled her face, her lilting laugh sounded.

"Don't you worry none; I'll be seeing you—more than you like, maybe."

"You mean that you promise?"

"Why, man alive, I've sworn that to others than you!"

Before he could question the cause of her sudden levity she had set the jug in the road before him and disappeared, as swiftly as her brother had lately done, up the bank and into the thicket.

Exasperated by this last of her gazelle-like fleings, he started to follow her, but was halted by a sudden doubt. In the roadway Teetotaler was sniffing eagerly at the cork of the jug. Parker joined him.

Had the girl been honest in her exchange of promises or was she playing a joke whose brutality she could not know? Was the test of his new-found strength at last in his possession?

His heart beating as it rarely had beat for woman, he removed the cork.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### JUG'S BOTTOM.

NEVER, felt Calvin Parker, had he painted with such power; certainly never with more speed. All afternoon he had been hard at it, working in an ecstasy of eagerness and strength. Now, in the good-night beams of the sun, he placed his easel where the light might reach it best and backed off to study the new picture with emotional, almost worshipful, gaze.

For the sake of perspective, he had pushed the deal table to one side with its litter of color tubes, brushes and bottles of oil. Also upon its sheet of the checked oilcloth stood the brown, gallon jug of the morning's compromise.

His gratitude on finding it full and the mountain girl as good as her word had rehabilitated his pledge to himself of temperance. Only through his nostrils had he drunk of it along the way, a scant two fingers of it had been poured to his first toast of the afternoon.

"For medicinal purposes only!"

The mild, crushed-flower aroma of the liquid, its clear-as-crystal color, its thinness, as of the pure spring water it resembled, made Vernaluska's warning seem a boast. But with the sear of unripened liquor through his mouth and throat he knew that the Metcalf distillation was not weak.

"And old Tom disgusts bad liquor!" he made comment aloud to Boomer and his mate who, according to custom, had dropped in to lunch. "Up to date, this popskull is the only thing I've met in the Blue Ridge that's short on time—time to get mellow. Yet maybe it's only the first drink that burns." He turned to the jug. "Wonder how many of those temperance two-fingers are in you?"

Dipping the handle of a paint brush into its small neck, he tested its wet capacity, indicating the height thereof with a circle upon the brown outside.

His after-luncheon, clock-timed cultivation of the enemy whom he had sworn to make his friend, somehow brought him loneliness, rather than companionship.

Why had he traded in that promise to give up what he had set himself to achieve—the location of the Metcalf still? With a little dickering, he might have saved himself that diversion and also the whisky. He had sold out too cheaply. A single gallon was no price at all for his word of honor to stay on his side of Roaring Fork until the girl of the hills gave her permission that he cross.

He wished he could see her at once. If she had not been inclined to believe in him, to like him, despite her manner, why had she acted as she had done?"

There had been amusement behind her return promise that she would seek him out; was this at his expense? Would she ever seek him?

The eyes of Sylvia's photograph peered mildly down from the mantel through the smoke, as if asking why he should feel alone, with her in his memory. A surge of loyalty caused him to pour a draft, generous as his feeling of apology, and throw it off at a gulp.

"So small, so vaguely sweet, so frail—yet the great reward of victory," he toasted her.

But the response of a photograph was necessarily limited. Parker's sense of loneliness increased when the Boomers, having feasted to repletion on the guests' share of his lunch, began long absences of carrying tidbits to the kiddies in the armored pine.

For the first time he tried to catch them. He wanted to pet them, to show them his affection. Each time he lunged after them, however, they barked squeakily, with terror, and eluded his open hands. Finally they scampered over the sill not to reappear.

"Why does Vernaluska — you — everybody run away from me?"

From the checkered oilcloth, the mouth of the jug grinned in derisive reproach.

"That's so; there's you left, friend jug. Beg your pardon." He bowed humbly and allowed himself to sip from its good cheer.

Before many more such sips inspiration came, took charge of a lagging afternoon. An attractive idea came to him, grew in appeal, finally controlled both hands and mind.

Why need he ever be alone, Calvin Parker, who was said by the critics to possess the ability to create personalities from tubes, brushes, oils? This ever-fleeing mountain girl—he would catch her on canvas and make her stay. From first glimpse he had intended to paint her to attempt combining that marvelous softness and brilliancy of her hair.

What was it which the look of her, the spirit of her, the name of her had suggested all along?

In her was combined delicacy with force, hope built on fear, life that was young, alluring, colorful—life that sprang from what? Why was she like the rhododendron

flower that lifted its face straight to the sun from a bank of the winter's dead leaves?

Ah, he had it at last!

She was Spring. That was why she was so elusive, yet so strong. That was why her smiles suggested tears shed. Her very life meant past death. She was Spring. To him she was Vernaluska, not "Verney," but Verne.

His rapid sketch was reminiscent of her unexpected appearance that morning from the roadside thicket—reminiscent, yet far from literal. No lavender gingham clothed her form, no country shoes her feet. As the painter stood now at eventide, surveying his work, a frenzy of gratitude possessed him for the license allowed to art.

From a background of brush, with only here and there a sprouting thing to suggest the season, the girl fled toward him on bare feet, her dazzling body revealed through a fluttering drapery of young green, hands outstretched, eyes side-glancing with a look of anxiety lest she be outsped, lips curved with a tremulous, promising smile. Like a veil of spun copper from about and above her floated backward her hair. Boldly beneath, Parker painted his title:

#### SPRING IS HERE!

"And here to stay, you darling, you beauty; here to stay!" he exulted, addressing her aloud, adoring her closer and closer in the waning glow from the west door. "It's time to light the night-lights, but you cannot run away. It's time for supper—to-night you'll have to watch me while I eat. You cannot mock me any more, you cannot deny me. For you're spring-time, and you can't help being as sweet to me as to any other man."

He spared a moment from her in which to be pleased with himself. He lurched about the shack, found and lit the candles. Steadying himself against the mantel-shelf, he surprised more than mild interest in Sylvia's flower eyes. The approval which she would have felt could she have watched him this afternoon beamed on him from the steel print. After she had toasted him, he toasted her. Then, having made his peace with her, he drank one more to Verne. Pulling his camp-stool close and seating himself,



that he might look up under the lashes of her timorous eyes, he sipped a wee drop more while he talked with her.

He had her at last, tricky jade, he told her. He would not be lonely any more. Let the father and mother shadow tails desert him for their squirrelettes in the pine; he need not care. She could not leave him night or day. The white fire from her father's jug had thrown a flash-light on her, had revealed her to him as she was. Her occasional intolerance was her protest against the prick of thorns in the brush from which she came, the hurt of stones along her life-path. Now that he understood her, now that he had caught and could hold the spirit of her, she would learn to like to stay.

"You are here—you are mine, youth, power, sentience," he whispered to her and to himself, tears stumbling down his emotional face, even as the liquor drizzled to the floor from the glass in his shaking hand. "Do you mind, Verne? Sweet, I hope you do not mind!"

Next moment, remembrance mixed his metaphorical intensity. He chuckled in reassurance, tipped the glass to his lips, let the overflow of his hurry mix with the salt-drops on his chin.

Had she not been predisposed toward him from first sight? If not, why the exertion to drag him from the mud, to wipe his face, dig out his ears? Why that memorable smile at the post-office, the visit to his cabin, the silent protectorate of him against her father's possible outbreak, her culminating presentation of the jug? She was a woman; he must make allowances for that; a woman with all and probably more of the average woman's contradictory ways. All mere man could do was to fasten his eyes on fact. And every fact, despite her words, her every act had favored him.

Supper seemed a prosaic thing by contrast with the successive toasts he drank to Verne and himself, so he put it off. Again curiosity, keen as anxiety, cause him to dip the paint-brush handle into the mouth of the "bust-head" jug. At first he felt somewhat disconcerted to note that it was almost half-empty. Next moment he decided that he might as well drink an even

half of the "bumblings" before he ate—let them sting him into a first-class appetite if they could! Another circle of measurement he painted around the brown jug.

Gyrating once toward Sylvia, he anticipated a possible reproach. It was a long, long way to the bottom of the jug, he told her, when a man could paint under its influence as he had done that P.M. And he wanted her clearly to understand that it was from no interest in the concrete of his subject that he had been inspired to such results. Vernaluska Metcalf was a beautiful girl, truly, and a girl with lure, probably, for certain men of the wild; but it was the spirit behind her personality that he had put upon canvas, a conception which her looks merely aided to express.

"Y'understand, dear? But of course you do!" he apostrophized as glibly as his thickened lips would permit. "To women I am all artist; to you only, the one woman, am I man. We Parkers love well and once."

To entertain his receptive audience became his concern. For them he recited "The Rubric of Rum," a composition of his own, relic of college days when people laughed at the tendency which later they deplored. In this metered effort were consigned to verse the various excuses offered by various mortals for their libations. They drank to warm up in cold weather, they drank to cool down in hot. Good fortune deserved a celebration, bad luck a beaker to console. At birth was uncorked sparkling wine for the christening, at death sustaining brandy for the wake. Friendship tipped the loving-cup, enmity the poison-draft of hate. It mattered not, through the vicissitudes of life—thirst supplied his own glib excuse.

Parker, declaiming such fragments of his literary achievement as came to mind, gesticulated and bowed with animation, if not dramatic effect, first to one, then the other of his audience. His eyes were fervid; his grin sardonic. By way of realism, he tossed off a drink with each metered citation.

What if he did get a bit tipsy reciting his "Rubric of Rum," he once lapsed into prose to argue? Thirst had inspired it—let thirst then pay the piper!

The brilliance with which his intemper-

ance always had been associated called for more lights. In his larder he found an unopened candle-box. Dripping grease for sockets in half a dozen available places, he proceeded worthily to illuminate the occasion. Although the effect in the rough-boarded shack was not exactly garish, he was pleased. Whole-heartedly, he drank to the general good-cheer.

"Electric-lighted N'York's got nothing on Fallaway—while the candles last. Here's to Spring, who's brought us life!"

Before each of his fair, lip-tight guests he held a potion; then, in response to their gentle suggestions, obliged by the consumption thereof himself. Tacking against the headwind of intoxication, he introduced and explained one to the other.

Who had sent him to the Blue Ridge for his own best good, in quest of the "grip" which he had got? His valley lily of the *conservatoire*, his Sylvia.

Who had angered him with her criticism? Who but the rhododendron girl. Who had helped him with her ridicule, had appealed with her very aloofness, had diverted his search for the regional illicit brew, then had set at his feet the fiery draft for devils or gods? None but Vernaluska, fitly named for a mountain in her mystery and uncompromising strength, yet wafted over by a spirit as delicious, as balmy, as virile as the winds of early May?

"And you'll stay, Verne; you'll stay, won't you, Verne?" he cried in a recurrence of maudlin entreaty.

Emotion wobbled his knees. He lurched sidewise into a chair beside the table, stretched both arms across its checkered oilcloth toward the radiant being stepping so daintily, fearsomely, shyly toward him.

"You've brought me life—you'll not take it away?" he sobbed. "You'll stay with me and like me and let me like you? Couldn't you promise me never, never to go?"

His face fell into his clutching hands. The shoulders built for such strength shuddered weakly, then held still. Only a wobble of the dark, attractive head resented a sudden crash that sounded from the puncheon floor.

The gallon container had been knocked

over on its side, had rolled to the edge of the table and over. But not a drop of liquid wasted from its derisive little mouth.

As it chanced, Calvin Parker had reached the bottom of his jug.

Screaming pain awakened his other mind. Ordered by that greater voice, so often raised in the cause of drunkards, his body staggered up; the physical of his eyes stared about him, crazed from suffering. The candles on the table had burned to stubs, one sleeve of his coat was smoldering over seared flesh.

Ordered again, he lunged across the room to the water-pail, uttered a gasping cry as he sizzled his arm into it, turned and searched the gloom in a half-conscious fear lest Verne also be endangered by flame.

He located her, peering at him from the drawing-stand, shy, sweet, reassuring. He started toward her, meaning to clutch one of the outstretched hands and lay it upon his wound in the conviction that such strong, long fingers must have curative power. But he stopped and glanced behind at a hostile sound.

The back door had blown open, wind was leveling the flame of such candles as still stood. Something had rushed in beside the wind—something black, darting, winged. It batted the walls, struck the puncheon of the floor, rose in swift, astonishing spirals.

It was not Parker's subconsciousness that apprehended the nature of the disturbance which was shaking him with fear more hideous than the pain of his arm. The small, awakening fraction of his conscious mind, rather, bade him leap after it in urgent terror—terror not so much for himself as for Verne, who had come to stay.

The thing which had entered was an enemy airplane, the purpose of the demon at the controls to seize and bear away his spirit of Spring. Deviously, to confuse him, it was darting hither and yon, but its objective could not be in doubt. So; he would meet artifice with superior artifice!

*Don Quixote* had fought windmills—a small issue compared with the tilt in prospect. One aviator would wish he never had quite his airdrome. With a bestial snarl of challenge, Parker crouched low near the



canvas. Just let this winged intruder make the attempt—let him swoop nearer if he dared! Crushed fuselage, twisted tail, and broken wings—into what a wreck would the machine be twisted! The shock-absorber or stabilizer was not built that could withstand the superman, Cal Parker, under threat of the unspeakable deprivation.

The thing approached, evidently banking for an easy turn. The moment for counter-attack was about to come—*had* come.

With all the power of his vitriol-fed limbs, Parker shot into the air. He reached, he clutched the outspread wings of the enemy plane. He brought it down. With giant-strong fingers, he crushed and tore it as together they fell. Only when sure that it would never move again, did he collapse, in a deathlike sprawl, upon the floor.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

SPRING IS HERE.

THE day was new-born, fragrant of breath, dewy-eyed. From the Metcalf clearing rode a colorful maid upon a white, red-legged steed—Vernaluska and Solomon, starting betimes to a full day's work.

They did not, however, turn into the well-worn path on the homestead side of Roaring Fork that led to the clay-bank studio. Tucking up her green "habit" around her lifted feet, the rider put the little beast to the stream. With only a waggle of the longest ears in captivity did Solomon protest her guidance. Then he dipped his slim legs into the flood, felt with care for loose or slippery stones, gallantly convoyed across the mistress who could decide no wrong. Into the woodsy trail on the other side he padded with a noiseless, swinging gait.

From the first Vernaluska had fulfilled with system and good-cheer the duties of the office which she had won against such odds. Any inherent repugnance for the act of spying had been promptly allayed by a thought of still more repugnant possibilities, had not the mercurial Sandryed, Rex Currie and her father been overcome in discussion. So now she leaned forward to tickle Solomon's forehead in the spot of keenest mule delight, and adjured him to

enjoy, as she tried to do, their service to the family.

"Pretend like we're taking a pleasure voyage. The woods are an ocean of perfume. You-uns, Sol, are my boat."

She breathed deeply the salt, crisp tonic of green in the shrubbery that already surged over the ridgetop—the dogwood blossoms that gleamed like phosphorescence on southern seas; the varitinted azaleas that flamed atop, wave after wave, as of burning oil on the surface of a gently swelling sea.

Making a considerable *détour* into a sunlit meadow, where thrived certain tall, black-hearted yellow flowers, she consulted the popular necromancer known as "Susan" on love. After reaching down for a flower, she began to tear off its yellow rays.

"Does—don't. Me—another. Does—don't. Me—another. Does—don't." Thus she chanted as she pulled.

The destruction of the daisy, excusable from its heartfelt purpose, continued until but one ray clung to the black heart of wizardry. This she withdrew tenderly and pressed to her lips.

"He loves me!" she cried in so triumphant a voice that a near-by pine warbler performed a spiral and the beast under obligation to his name to be so wise cut quite a caper by way of celebration.

When Solomon was hidden at the mouth of Scape-cat Run, Vernaluska approached the cabin on the Rim with the usual caution of her matutinal watch. She found a lapsing silence that had not been the rule of other mornings. Fear clutched her—a fear which the presence of the pinto stamping in his shed could not reassure.

Had the out-Norther for once, slipped away before her arrival? Had he suspected that other reason behind her presentation of the jug? Under condonation of his official duty had he broken his word to her by starting at dawn to run down the family still? She stepped into the open, crossed the small clearing, and entered the cabin's back door.

After the brilliant sunlight without, the windowless interior seemed dark. The girl peered along the side of the room that came first into focus. The bunk was in-

cluded in her glance—an empty bunk. Her face showed self-reproach over her dilatoriness. What sort of a one-man guard was she who risked so much on an assumption, even though since yesterday it had strengthened into hope?

Was he, after all, what they said he was? If so, of course he wouldn't wait around for her to outsluck him!

She took a forward step, noted the long-cold ashes of the hearth; the table in the center of the room, untidy with glasses and greased over with small hillocks of burned candles. Gingerly she stepped among the chairs which surrounded the table, one still on all fours, two on their sides. Perplexity caught her that a man so immaculate should live in such disorder.

Then something really disturbing caught her eye. From the far side of the room a girl creature in none too many clothes seemed speeding directly toward her. "Spring is here," she read in golden letters at the elfin creature's feet. In a flash she grasped the vitality of the conception, stepped closer to admire. The flesh-tones gleaming through the veil of green; the long, yet rounded limb-lines; the young bust; the outstretched hands—all held her in a breathless sensation of something precious to her and familiar.

\* The face—it was hers! Idealized, strange from its look of commingled fear and promise, whitened to a dazzling purity—yet hers beyond a doubt. And the hair—none could mistake her hair!

Vernaluska's admiration died in a flare of resentment. How dared he paint her in this shameless garb, the out-North spy? What had she said, what done to give his imagination license? Well was it that she had come to his empty shack to discover this desecration of her modesty!

On the floor just below the canvas lay a palette, still thick with paint. Upon the table were brushes. Stooping, she gathered them up. No artist in oils was she, yet she must fashion a dress to cover the lovely body. She would leave a sight of her visit calculated to show this man from lewd civilization the decency to be learned in the hills!

Her brush was dipped, her arm forward stretched, describing the line with which to begin her reconstruction, when a sound startled her. Turning, she saw what she had not seen before in the far corner of the room.

A gasp escaped her lips. The palette and brush she dropped to stifle other outcry with her hands. She sprang back, then turned to face the thing upon the floor.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

## A SIMPLE SONG

"IF I could stand," the poet said,  
"Upon yon mountain's distant crest,  
And catch the songs from overhead,  
My soul no more would sigh for rest."

He stood upon the lonely height,  
And heard the singing of the spheres;  
He caught the music in its flight,  
And sent it ringing down the years.

But no one listened to the strain  
That echoed from the far away;  
"Alas!" he cried, "my toil is vain;  
Too grand these songs for such as they."

And then he softly touched his lyre  
And sang a song so wild and sweet,  
Of bleeding hope and dead desire—  
And lo! the world was at his feet.

James C. Rockwell.



# A Chinaman's Chance

by H.A. Lamb



## I.

"MR. FU CHEN to see you, sir." Rob Harding looked up from his desk. It was a mahogany desk. Probably it had cost McKestry & Squires a round sum when it was bought. It stood with several others neatly ranged against the wall in the space allotted to the junior employees of the investment house. Harding's papers were placed in orderly piles—correspondence and customers' files. McKestry & Squires liked to see a well arranged desk.

"Who?" said Harding.

The office boy grinned. Harding was popular with him.

"It's a Mr. Fu Chen—a Chinaman. But he don't wear no pigtail. He says he knows you—"

"Oh, Fu Chen. Bring him right in."

Harding smiled. Years ago when he had been old enough to go alone to school and young enough to play hooky, he had frequently spent hours at the laundry of Fu Chen, around the corner from his home. The Chinaman had given him dried, sugared fruits of strange vintage to eat, and incense sticks to play with. Also, Harding had delighted in watching the laundryman paint queer crosses and lines on the parcels of clothes. It had been a secure refuge.

Later, he had formed the habit of dropping in for a word or two with Fu Chen. Harding, from boyhood up, had the gift of making friends. Fu Chen, who did not seem to alter in the least with the passage

of years, had welcomed him. Sometimes Harding had watched the Chinaman play, with a few companions in the inner room, unending games of fan tan. He had wanted to join in the games; but Fu Chen would not let him.

Harding had outgrown the fruits and punk sticks. He had come to wonder how the Chinaman worked so constantly over the ironing-board. He would have wondered more if he knew how many nights the laundryman spent over the roulette or stuss tables in the gambling joints of the lower Bowery.

But Fu Chen's ancestors had passed their lives in pushing wheelbarrows equipped with wind sails and loaded with cotton bales sufficient to weigh down four mules; or in laboring at the oar of a river junk. They were tireless workers, and equally tireless gamblers. Both these characteristics were Fu Chen's.

When Harding married and set up house-keeping, Molly, his wife, had objected to sending the family laundry to the small and perhaps not altogether sanitary shop of Fu Chen. Harding, remembering the sugared ginger and punk sticks of his boyhood days, had overruled her objections.

Once Molly had visited the Chinaman.

"You have plenty children soon, Mrs. Molly," beamed Fu Chen. "I give them plenty joss sticks, you bet."

Thereafter Molly had sent the maid when she had business to transact with Fu Chen. Harding had laughed when she told him about the episode. "He's a good old chap,"

he said. "He'd be hurt if I sent the wash to one of these new steam laundries."

Harding had seen little of the Chinaman, once he became a bond salesman. Molly, because the laundry was neatly done and promptly, ceased to remark upon the evils of "that Chinaman's place." Then, on an evening when Harding was hurrying past the laundry to his home, Fu Chen had trotted out and stopped him. He asked Harding into his shop—into the back room.

"You invlest money?" he asked.

"Why, yes," assented the bond salesman, surprised. "That's my business; when I can find anybody with money to invest."

Fu Chen beamed. He said, in his broken English, that the Harding maid had gossiped about her master's business. He had been thinking, he added.

"You invlest money me?" he inquired anxiously. "Hunded, ten dol-lar?"

Now McKestry & Squires were not accustomed to handling amounts under the thousands. The firm's clients were among the notables of New York. Harding had wondered how Fu Chen had come to accumulate a hundred and ten dollars. Usually, he remembered, the laundryman squandered his earnings at the gaming table.

"I might," he considered, "on my own account. What kind of an investment have you in mind?"

Fu Chen's smile broadened. Savings banks, he explained, were no good. He had put in some money once, and when he had taken it out it had been the same amount, neither more nor less—to his disappointment.

"You know how," he concluded. "I give you hundred, ten dol-lar; you give me more some time, maybe."

"In other words," Harding laughed, "you want to speculate in stocks, Fu Chen."

Harding, being an intelligent young man with a wife to support, had not touched speculation. He knew the odds against making money at that game, the heavy odds against the man who "takes a flier in stocks." However, it was part of his profession to know the stock-market. He took out the evening paper that he had in his

pocket and scanned it while Fu Chen counted out the hundred and ten dollars.

Among the quotations for that day had been a number of low-priced railroad stocks. It was a year when rails were out of favor. Tampa and Quimberly common caught his eye. This particular stock was christened Tee and Que by the traders—T. & Q. on the tape.

"It may be lucky," he observed humorously. "Tee and Que—a Chinese name. Eh, Fu Chen?"

"You buy it," decided that gentleman promptly. The word luck stands for a great reality with the superstitious Chinaman. No buck negro coaxing his dice was more a servant of the fickle god than Fu Chen.

Harding had bought it. T. & Q., he reasoned, was selling at six dollars and a few cents a share. Naturally, the road was bankrupt, and in about as bad a condition as could be imagined. Nothing more could very well happen to it, reasoned Harding. If it could not get worse, it might get better. Anyway, if the venture turned out badly, he would pay Fu Chen the hundred and ten out of his own pocket. So he purchased, through an odd-lot house, eighteen shares of T. & Q., and gave the certificate to Fu Chen.

And promptly forgot about it.

Not so the Chinaman. From time to time he would remind Harding of the "invlestment."

Now it happened that the rails came into favor with the buying public again. Many were found who thought along the lines that Harding had reasoned out. T. & Q. rose. After a year it was quoted at fourteen dollars a share.

Harding had explained this to Fu Chen. The Chinaman understood—and bought more of T. & Q. It was lucky; and when the devils of chance smiled on Fu Chen he was not one to keep them waiting.

From time to time during the next few years Fu Chen had Harding buy more of T. & Q.—ten or twelve shares at a time. Harding had taught the Chinaman to watch the quotations in the stock reports and interpret them.

But never before to-day had Fu Chen



ventured to call at the office of McKestry & Squires. Harding had confided the story of the investment to the members of the firm. It had become something of a joke in the house. Time—notwithstanding popular belief to the contrary—frequently hangs heavily on the hands of investment agents. Harding would be asked: "How's the Chink's stock?" "Going strong," he would reply, laughing.

He looked up with curiosity as Fu Chen entered.

## II.

THE Chinaman was dressed in a decent black coat, and black fedora. His broad-toed shoes were polished, and he wore a dark silk handkerchief in place of a collar. He bowed with embarrassed politeness, and remained standing—refusing the chair Harding offered him.

"Glad to see you," observed the salesman. "What can I do for you?" He guessed that it must be something important to bring Fu Chen into the portals of a place like the office of McKestry & Squires.

"I want see you, Mr. Bob—vellee much."

Fu Chen launched into his tale at once. A strange tale it was, full of eloquent gestures, apologies, and butchered English. Harding listened attentively. When the Chinaman had finished, he rose.

"I think Mr. Squires may be able to tell you what you want to know, Fu Chen. I can't."

He left the room, returning presently with the junior partner. Fu Chen bowed, not once but several times, in recognition of the cutaway that Squires wore.

"This is my friend, Mr. Fu Chen," introduced Harding.

The junior partner smiled. "We've heard of you," he said.

He had humorous gray eyes that lighted in friendly fashion. Fu Chen's embarrassment deepened. The Chinaman had not expected to see an individual who, he thought, was plainly by reason of his stoutness and long-tailed coat, one of the upper-class mandarins.

"As nearly as I can gather," explained Harding, "Mr. Fu Chen wants to know if

it is a good time to sell T. & Q. He has quite a number of the shares, you know. A man at one of the gambling joints on the Bowery offered him cash for the stock—and more than the present quotations."

"T. & Q. sold yesterday at thirty-one and a half," commented the junior partner gravely. "What did the—the gambler chap offer you?"

Fu Chen ejaculated two words which Harding translated as "Thirty-five dollars."

Squires's level eyebrows rose.

"I never knew any one to offer money that he didn't expect to get back, somehow, Fu Chen. Don't sell."

Fu Chen ducked his head. "You say so? All light."

He turned as if to go when Squires checked him.

"Funny about that cash offer, Harding. Now, if T. & Q. was an oil stock—hold on. Come here a minute."

He led the two out to where a ticker was rapping out the day's quotations. He skimmed the tape through his fingers with the skill of long practise. And showed Harding a figure.

"Thought so. T. & Q.'s at thirty-four and a quarter, and strong. Now what made it jump three points overnight?"

Fu Chen eyed the ticker with intent wonderment. It was a sort of magic, he thought—a machine that talked of itself. He waited impassively while Squires and Harding went to the news ticker and conferred.

"Congratulations, Fu Chen," said the junior partner, coming back. "The news is out. Guess your friend saw it in the late editions last night. Oil has been struck along the right-of-way of the T. & Q. The railroad runs through one of the richest oil regions of the West. The stock will be worth double its present figure in a month."

The Chinaman hardly understood this, but Harding interpreted.

"Your luck's good, Fu Chen," he said. "You hold T. & Q.—tight. Maybe you get seventy dollars for it in a month. Don't sell to any one, unless I tell you to. How many shares have you?"

"Shares?" Fu Chen thought. "Thirty."

"I didn't know you had so much. Well, you'll be rich before long—have a lot of money."

When Fu Chen had made his smiling exit and Squires had returned to his sanctum, Harding went back to his desk. Fu Chen had been lucky, he thought. Well, he was glad. He wished, though, that he might have had some of T. & Q. himself. He and Molly had just bought a house in the suburbs. It had cost a good deal, and Harding's bank balance had suffered accordingly.

That night T. & Q. closed at thirty-nine.

The next day and the next it rose some more. The territory around the small, one track line had developed oil in quantity. The T. & Q. trains were again in full operation. Better, the railroad company owned one of the big gushers.

T. & Q. continued its steady rise. Oil stocks were selling high. The Street began to talk of possible dividends on the T. & Q. There were rumors of a melon about to be cut by the once despised line.

Commission houses began to telegraph their clients that T. & Q. was a good thing. Western wire houses bought of it heavily. It was doubly attractive, for it was both a railroad and oil stock.

A week after Fu Chen's visit to McKestry & Squires, T. & Q. touched sixty. It was in great demand, and those who had the stock were keeping it.

"Your Chink friend has a good thing," commented McKestry, who had heard about the visit, in passing. "Why not buy him out? He'd sell to you."

"No thanks," refused Harding. "It's his investment. It's good for a big rise. They're talking of eight per cent dividend on the common stock—"

McKestry passed on with an assenting nod, and Harding leaned back in his chair, well content. He was glad that Fu Chen was going to make some money. Abruptly, he frowned. The thought of money reminded him that his balance at the bank was down to some three hundred dollars.

Then his brow lightened. After all, he had his salary. And he and Molly had bought the home in the suburbs. They would need that home, because, well, be-

cause there would soon be three in the family.

Harding drew out a piece of note-paper. He smiled, recalling what Fu Chen had once said to Molly—that she would soon have children. Idly, he noted down on the paper a rough statement of his—as he put it to himself humorously—assets and liabilities.

Under "assets" he wrote down the three hundred in the bank. And his salary, as "current income."

Under liabilities he put the monthly rent of his new house. He had bought it on the usual plan—one half down in cash, the rest to be paid in the form of rent. And he added a round sum, "for Molly's personal account in the near future."

He surveyed the paper with grave approval. A printed slip among his letters caught his eye. It was a notice from his bank that his note for twenty-five hundred dollars was due within a week.

Harding had forgotten the note. He could afford to smile at the printed form. It had been a favor to a friend. Ed Wheeler, a college chum, had started business recently in New York as a real-estate broker. Wheeler had needed some money a couple of months ago, and Harding had signed his name to the note for twenty-five hundred that Wheeler had discounted at their bank.

"Wheeler's just about as honest as they make 'em," he thought to himself, "and his business as good as—well, three hundred per cent good. He was a stranger at the bank, that's all."

There was no reason for Harding to worry about payment of the note. Wheeler had the money, or would have when the time came to pay off the twenty-five hundred. He—Harding—had lunched with him only the other day.

He scribbled down the twenty-five hundred under "liabilities." Then crossed it out. McKestry & Squires would not approve of his backing another man's note. It was one of the rules of the firm. Perhaps that was because McKestry & Squires did not want trouble over money matters among their employees.

An investment house has to be jealous of its publicity, Harding thought indulgently.



It was as much as his job was worth, if McKestry knew of the note. But the transaction would be closed in a few days. Meanwhile—

He tore up his mock balance sheet and went to seek his hat. He would lunch with Ed Wheeler. Perhaps he would tell him that Molly was going to have a son, or daughter.

Smiling at the reflection, he sought for his friend among the tables of the place where they lunched. Wheeler had not come in yet. Harding inquired for him casually of the proprietor of the restaurant.

"Ain't you heard?" asked that individual. "Mr. Wheeler was run down by a motor-car this morning. He's in the hospital, badly hurt."

Harding whistled softly. Ed Wheeler was one of his best friends. He went to the phone in the lunch-room and called up the hospital the other had named.

When he left the phone his face was serious. Wheeler was severely injured. He was unconscious, suffering from concussion. A fracture of the skull was feared. Wheeler might die or he might live. But he was very ill.

Not until then did Harding recall the note he and Wheeler had signed. He finished his lunch hastily and went out. From a near-by booth he called up Wheeler's office. He inquired whether his friend had left instructions for the payment of the note when it fell due. A clerk answered him.

Wheeler had left no instructions. He attended to such things himself.

"But you know about the note," returned Harding. "It has got to be paid."

"I did not know of it, sir."

"You have the cash in the office safe, or somewhere, to pay it with?"

There was a pause. Then—

"No, sir. We have only a little cash here. Mr. Wheeler would know—"

"He can't be reached now." Harding frowned uneasily. "Look here: can you raise twenty-five hundred in six days?"

"Not that I know of, sir. Mr. Wheeler must have arranged it himself."

"I see." Harding hesitated. "All right."

He returned to McKestry & Squires. This time he did not forget the note. He

took out the slip from the bank and read it through again. When he left the office that night his face was grave.

### III.

BUT it was not all right. And Harding knew it. When a note is due at the bank, that note must be paid. Harding had signed his name to the note. If Wheeler did not bring the money to the bank, he—Harding—must pay the twenty-five hundred dollars.

And he did not have twenty-five hundred dollars. He was worried. Wheeler must have made an arrangement for paying the money. But Wheeler—as he learned when he visited the hospital, on the second day—was not able to see any one.

A fracture of the skull, even slight, is a serious matter. There had been an operation. His friend was in a semiconscious state, and had not yet spoken a word.

"Ask him about business?" the physician snorted. "Man, you're crazy. Impossible. It will be a week, if all goes well, before we let him talk at all. Maybe you can see him in ten days—"

"I understand," nodded Harding. "Well, don't worry him about my visit."

From the hospital he went to the bank. A brief question there told him what he wanted to know. The bank expected payment of the note when it was due. Not a renewal, but payment. If Wheeler could not pay, Harding would be called upon.

Not until then did the bond salesman allow himself to realize that he was in a fix.

"A devil of a fix, too," he thought grimly. "Twenty-five hundred dollars' worth."

He took out a sheet of scrap-paper and figured on it. He had three hundred in the bank. His salary for the week would add a little more. An advance on his salary for the next month would add more. The total was only five hundred.

And, meanwhile, he and Molly had to live. He had said nothing to her about the note. He must not worry her now.

There was the home in the suburbs, of course. But—Molly had just finished putting the last touches to the hangings and furniture. They were planning to move in as soon as she should be able to. As soon as the Harding family numbered three.

Molly had set her heart on the country home. She would need the change of air. She *must* keep the home. Harding tore up the paper, and there was a dogged set to his good-natured mouth as he did so.

The next day or two went badly for him. Only once did he have occasion to smile. Fu Chen came in.

The Chinaman wore a new celluloid collar with a tie of gorgeous hues. This, coupled with a derby hat, was a sign of unwonted prosperity. He grinned at Harding.

T. & Q., said Fu Chen, was at eighty. It had more than doubled its price in the last few days.

"You're lucky," smiled Harding. "Why, you own thirty shares. At eighty that's a good deal of money. Hang on to T. & Q."

"You bet!" assented Fu Chen forcibly.

Harding asked if he had closed the laundry. Fu Chen seemed surprised. Why should he? He needed money for fan-tan.

"Still trying to make the 'big play,' eh?"

Fu Chen said he was, and departed, with a curious look at Harding. For a second the Chinaman had hesitated, as if about to ask a question.

Harding turned back to his desk silently. The "big play" he had mentioned had been something of a joke with them. For years, with the patient expectancy of the Oriental gambler, Fu Chen had staked his money at the roulette table. Whenever he had twenty dollars gleaned from his laundry work, or more likely his fan-tan, the Chinaman would stake it for the big play—a hundred-to-one chance. If the little ball in the roulette wheel should fall into the pocket he had wagered on, he would be rich. Otherwise, he lost his money.

He had always lost.

Harding had never understood why Fu Chen wanted to throw good money after bad in this fashion. At fan-tan or dice, thrown in the bowl, Chinese fashion, Fu Chen could have an evening's sport, and win or lose five or ten dollars. But at roulette—a whirl of the wheel and he was broke for another four or five months.

But Harding did not know the Chinese gambling soul. Or the thrill that comes in watching a whirl of the wheel once in four

months. It was akin to no other sensation that Fu Chen knew—that brief moment by the roulette table. Fu Chen, perhaps, suspected that the wheel did not always revolve fairly; but he did not cease trying for what Harding had dubbed the big play.

#### IV.

Two days passed without change in Wheeler's condition. Harding inquired at the hospital, and learned that his friend was conscious but unable to speak. Wheeler would recover. Harding was gladdened by this news. It left him, however, alone to meet the note that was due in two days.

He had figured it all out. He could get five hundred dollars together, neither more nor less. To borrow two thousand among his friends was out of the question. To ask it of McKestry, equally so. The investment house, in spite of personal friendship, could not afford to make good a bad debt of an employee.

The two days would pass, the bank would summon him for an accounting. They would confiscate his small stock of cash, and force the sale of the home in the suburbs. And Molly needed both money and a home. No one except Harding knew how badly she needed them.

He looked up quickly from his desk as McKestry appeared at his side. He wondered if McKestry had heard of the note. Bad news travels swiftly. But the senior partner had something else on his mind.

"By the way," observed McKestry, and paused. Harding's pulse quickened. "I've learned something about T. & Q., Harding. That stock has climbed all it's going to. The oil boom is up to its peak. And the T. & Q. aren't going to pay any dividends. The stock will break a dozen points when the bad news gets out. Better tell your client, Mr. Fu Chen, to sell out now while the selling's good—"

"Thanks," nodded Harding. "I will."

He dictated a letter in one syllable words to Fu Chen and sent it to the laundry by messenger. An hour brought the Chinaman to the office with his stock certificates.

If Harding said it was time to sell, Fu Chen was content. His luck had been good.

Meanwhile, Harding had telephoned the



order to sell thirty T. & Q. at the market. The sale went through before noon, while the stock was still strong. Harding got eighty-five for the stock. Then the unfavorable rumors began to flood into the Street.

T. & Q. wavered, and broke. On the ticker, Harding saw it drop to eighty-one. It closed at seventy-eight, a loss of seven points for the day. But Fu Chen had sold out.

Harding, knowing that the Chinaman could not cash a check, had the amount in cash. He counted the bills and placed them in one of the McKestry & Squires envelopes. As he did so he thought fleetingly that he might lie to Fu Chen—say something had happened to delay the sale. The Chinaman would believe whatever he said.

Yes, Fu Chen would accept what money Harding gave him without question. And the salesman needed the money—badly. The temptation passed as quickly as it had come. The money was Fu Chen's. Harding could not take it.

He sealed the envelope, marked it with Fu Chen's name, and put it in his pocket.

On his way home that evening he stopped at the laundry of Fu Chen. He found the Chinaman in black silk jacket and sandals bending over the ironing board.

"Here's your money, Fu Chen," he said. "Count it."

A gleam of interest crept into the Chinaman's stolid face as he fingered the yellow bills. He looked at Harding. "Velly good invlestment."

"I should say so," nodded the salesman briefly, intent on his own thoughts. "You were lucky."

"Thankee you, Mr. Bob." Fu Chen ducked his head in the manner that his father might have kowtowed before a friendly mandarin. Getting no response, he glanced at his visitor curiously from slant eyes. He plied his iron for a moment; then laid it down with decision. "You and Mrs. Molly catchem boy soon, maybe." He grinned. "Velly good: you bet!"

Harding started. Fu Chen explained that he had learned as much from the gossip of the maid who called for the laundry. Among Chinese the advent of a boy in the

family is an event more important than marriage or death or anything else. Harding laughed.

"That's why I wish I'd had some of your T. & Q., Fu Chen. It would come in handy now."

Although he had laughed, his eyes were mirthless and there were hard lines about his mouth—lines that had gathered in the past week. Fu Chen studied him. He had all an Oriental's keen observation, and he had known Harding for many years.

"You need money?" He thrust gnarled hands into his sleeves and leaned closer. "You likee some money, Mr. Bob?"

"I'd like some," admitted the salesman. "I never needed it quite as badly as I do now, Fu Chen."

"How much you want?"

"Two thousand or more."

Fu Chen nodded thoughtfully. His glance strayed to the pile of bills. The gods of luck presiding over the foreigners at McKestry & Squires had put this money in his hand. It was possible, thought Fu Chen, that these same gods had proved unlucky for Harding. Moreover, the Harding maid had gossiped—about doctors and the bills they sent. Fu Chen understood this. "They cuttee you—you pay 'em thousand dol-lar," he had observed sagely to the maid.

Then he told Harding something. He—Fu Chen—had money. He was rich, thanks to the strange gamble of the talking machine—the stock ticker—and the help of Harding. He would give some of this money to Mr. Bob. As much as that gentleman needed. Payment could wait.

It was a long speech for Fu Chen, and it taxed his scanty supply of English. Harding was silent for a moment.

"How long have you worked in this laundry?" he asked abruptly.

Fu Chen shook his head. His ideas of time were hazy.

"Well, it's fifteen or twenty years. And you've worked hard. I know." Harding smiled, not altogether cheerfully. "You'll need that money, Fu Chen. If you gave it to me, there's no telling how long it would be before you got it back again. No, you keep that money. Put it in the sav-

ings bank. Don't try to make the big play with it."

He took up his hat and moved toward the door. But his words stirred Fu Chen into sudden activity. The Chinaman's eyes widened slightly and he touched Harding's arm.

"You got twenty dol-lar?" he asked eagerly.

Harding nodded. To-day had been pay-day.

"You give me that twenty dol-lar."

"Haven't you got enough?"

Yes, Fu Chen had enough. But—

"I invlest it," he explained vehemently.

Harding declined good-naturedly.

"No, thanks."

Fu Chen, however, persisted. He wanted Harding to give him that twenty dollars. Only for a day or two. He had an idea, he said. What it was he would not say. Eventually Harding, who had other cares on his mind, gave him the money, and left the laundry.

#### V.

THAT evening when it was too dark to work, Fu Chen put aside his iron. Usually at this time he lighted the gas and kept on at his labor. To-night he did not do so.

In the cubby behind the laundry he exchanged his sandals for street shoes, and thrust a packet of cheap cigarettes into the breast of his blouse. Taking up his hat he stepped out into the street, locking the door after him. He lit one of the cigarettes and glanced up at a neighboring clock. It was the hour when white people would be sitting down to their dinners. But Fu Chen was not hungry.

The street lamps had glimmered forth, and the shadows gathered in the hallways. Fu Chen ascended the steps to the Elevated, and seated himself in a down-town train. At South Ferry he changed to an up-town, East Side train, threading his way through the crowd of belated commuters bound for the ferry.

At Chatham Square he descended to the noise and glare of the lower Bowery. Here he was in familiar surroundings. Blue clad Chinamen brushed past him, with gangs of seamen, and throngs of loafers. A strident

hand organ resounded from a winding street in which flared the inviting summons of a mission sign. Near him echoed the song of the tireless Salvation Army followers.

All these Fu Chen heeded not. He slipped quietly up the Bowery for two or three blocks. His wrinkled face was expressionless; his back bent from the toil of the laundry; his hands hidden in his sleeves. Only a slight widening of the faded, slant eyes showed that Fu Chen sought something of unusual interest near the narrow streets which are the entrance to Chinatown.

At a corner saloon he looked up quickly at the windows of the second floor. A dingy sign proclaimed a pool-parlor. He entered a hallway, but did not seek the pool-room. On the third floor of the structure he knocked at a door over which sputtered a gas-jet. The door opened at once, and Fu Chen slipped inside. It was a stuss joint, patronized by the dime sports of the lower East Side.

Fu Chen crossed to a beer-table where a mixed group of negroes, white sailors, and Chinamen were watching the fall of dice in a bowl. Here Fu Chen drew a hand from his sleeves and deposited some silver on the table. The dice were silently given him and he rolled them. A moment more and he drew back. His silver was gone. A drunken Norwegian elbowed him to one side.

Fu Chen merely glanced at the man fleetingly and withdrew from the circle. He stood back against the wall, and waited. It was early. Too early for Fu Chen's purpose.

An hour later Fu Chen left the stuss game and sought an alley off the street. At the end of the alley was a cigar-store, odorous of dirt and tobacco trimmings. The proprietor, a stout man in shirt sleeves and suspenders nodded to him, and he pushed through the curtain that shielded an inner room.

Here there was less noise than at the stuss game. Men gathered around a table looked up quickly at his entrance and let their gaze wander back to a wheel which spun and clicked on the table. Less silver and more bills were in evidence here.



Fu Chen patiently edged his way to the roulette wheel, and watched for a moment. Presently his hand reached out and dropped a roll of bills on a certain square of the table. The man at the wheel glanced up at him and nodded fleetingly.

"Twenty," said Fu Chen, and waited. Others made their plays. The wheel spun, the marble clicked, rolled and came to a halt.

Fu Chen shook his head slightly. The wrinkles in his grave face deepened. The man at the wheel swept up his twenty dollars. Fu Chen withdrew from the table.

Again he passed the fat man in the cigar-store. This time he paused at the alley entrance. From the Bowery came the hum of the late evening throng, echoing the rattle of the Elevated and the stentorian voice of the conductor of a rubberneck bus which rumbled by with paper lanterns at its prow. The Salvation Army song had long been silenced.

Fu Chen stood patiently, his sharp face turning slowly from side to side as if questing. He had not yet found what he wanted. He had wagered and lost Harding's twenty dollars. He was not yet satisfied.

While he watched, several taxis halted in front of one of the larger saloons. Fu Chen saw a touring-car discharge its group of men into the saloon. Then another. Fu Chen's head lifted. It was midnight. The men were arriving from the up-town theater section.

Fu Chen followed one of the groups into the saloon. They passed through the rear parlor where some women of the street were chattering in strident gaiety to a party of boys from up-town. Fu Chen paid no attention to them. Up-stairs he followed his guides, into a smoke-filled, brightly lighted room where a dozen tables held their throngs of men.

Here the noise was unrestricted. In the pages of the newspapers, and in the statements of the police, the lid was on the Bowery gambling joints. But this place stood in with the police, under guise of a private club. Fu Chen did not smile as he tendered a dollar bill to a powerful individual at the door and received a ticket entitling him to membership in the club.

He passed by the poker-tables and the roulette outfits. Dice were falling in one corner, and here Fu Chen stopped. He noted the yellow bills that lay on the board, the fashionable clothes of the men, and edged nearer.

A red-faced individual wearing a purple tie was chewing at a cigar and fumbling with dice—evidently well seasoned in drink. Beside him sat a well-dressed youth, apparently half asleep, except for deep breaths of a cigarette stuck to his lip. Fu Chen pointed to the dice and exhibited a small roll of green bills.

"Hello, here's a Chink!" The man of the purple tie chuckled and nudged his companion. "Small change, John, but—here we go. Watch us, boys!" He rattled the dice. "Read 'em and shed tears."

Fu Chen said nothing. At the end of five minutes he had won double his few bills. The red-faced man muttered under his breath.

"Say, don't tease me wid them ones and twos. Let's have real action." He fumbled in his pocket and drew out a twenty. "Come on, John. Let's see you grab that boy." He swore softly and licked his cigar. Fu Chen had thrown high dice every time. "Say"—his hand came out empty from his pocket, and he turned to the man with the cap and cigarette—"lend me a century."

"Nix," replied that person calmly. "Your luck's bad. The Chink's got your number."

Fu Chen drew a sibilant breath. Ignoring his late opponent, he showed a thick wad of bills and nodded at the man with the cap.

"You play high?" he suggested quickly. "I got money—five hundred, maybe more. You likee shoot 'em some?"

His bland face was impassive. But his black eyes were intent, with the sharp eagerness of a fox that scents something in the wind. Others around the table looked at the two.

"Fu Chen's got a roll," said one. "Take him on, Joe."

The youth of the cigarette hesitated. He liked better to back a sure thing—such as the earnings of the girls in the outer parlor, who were his property. Still, Fu Chen had

attracted attention to him, and he did not like to back down publicly.

"Sure," he said indifferently, tossing down five hundred in bills in front of him. "Get a bowl, John, and roll 'em. I'm wid you. Quick stuff for mine. Two outer three rolls takes the candy."

Fu Chen's eyes narrowed as he tossed the first dice into the bowl.

"Pair of threes," muttered the man of the purple tie. "Come on, Joe. You can beat—"

"Sure," whispered Joe. "Read the babies—a six an' eight. You pushed your luck too far, Fu Chen."

The Chinaman took up the dice silently. Attracted by the crowd around the table, the proprietor, "White" Jack Stetly pushed through the watchers and looked from Joe to Fu Chen. A silence had fallen on the group.

"Who's winner?" asked Stetly.

"Fu Chen," snarled Joe, rising in disgust. "Twice he beat me to it. He's lucky to-night."

Fu Chen leaned across the table.

"You shootee some?" he inquired of Stetly. "I got two thousand dol-lar. You shootee high, maybe?"

White Jack laughed and caressed a pink chin.

"Take it away, Fu Chen. Dis is a gambling joint. It ain't no charity joint. The gate's good enough for me. I roll square—see? And I ain't going to buck your luck."

Stetly grinned. It would not pay the house to risk a week's gate on the fall of dice in a Chinaman's bowl. But a newcomer appeared at his side. Fu Chen recognized the man as one who had come in the touring-car.

"They say there's a big game here, Jack," he nodded. "What's on?"

Stetly indicated Fu Chen.

"He's got a roll and wants to play two thousand cold. Two outer three shots. I won't touch it."

The stranger glanced swiftly at the expectant Fu Chen. He was a big man, well dressed, with a heavy-weight sparkler in his tie.

"For the holy love of God!" he swore.

"You going to let that good coin get by you? And a Chinaman at that? I'll call his bluff."

The speaker beckoned to his friends. A brief consultation, and three of the auto party produced eighteen hundred in cash between them. Fu Chen had not meant to bluff. He handed his money to Stetly, motioning for the other to do the same.

White Jack pocketed the bills. Word of the bet spread through the room and the other tables were forsaken while men elbowed for standing room about Fu Chen and his adversary.

Fu Chen touched the big man on the arm.

"We get 'em dice White Jack," he explained. "All light?"

The other hesitated. He had some dice of his own. But Stetly nodded.

"Fair enough—an' square enough," he approved. "Nobody's going to put up a yell about fake dice." He tossed a pair into the bowl. "Get to it, boys."

The big man shrugged his shoulders. Taking the dice, he offered them to Fu Chen, who clutched them eagerly and threw. This was the manner in which the Chinaman had gambled for a lifetime—the manner in which his father had won or lost copper string cash in the gambling places of Soo-Chow. And Fu Chen, that night, felt his luck was good.

He won the first throw.

While the men about him shoved nearer, and White Jack watched sharply, Fu Chen tossed the tiny cubes into the worn bowl and bent over them with a hiss of indrawing breath. His black eyes snapped as he saw two sixes.

"Hell!" grunted his opponent. He eyed his own effort, a two and nine, surlily, and wheeled on the proprietor. "For the love of God! This Chink's thrown high four times—twice. I'd like to know—"

"Wid my dice," said White Jack evenly, "he throws square—see? Fu Chen gets the coin. He put up his own coin against it. Likewise he gets outer here alone. Nobody leaves until five minutes after he's gone wid the four thousand. Understand?"

They understood. Fu Chen took his money and departed, without being trailed. He slipped from the saloon into an alley



that led to Pell Street. From there he struck due west, almost at a run.

His gait was uneven, and he was smiling. Men who saw him thought that he was drunk. They were right, partly. Fu Chen was intoxicated. But not with liquor.

At ten o'clock the next morning when Robert Harding entered his office at McKestry & Squires, he found Fu Chen waiting beside his desk. Fu Chen wore his best clothes and the derby hat. He had been there, he admitted, an hour. He showed no indication of the sleepless night he had spent.

"Got that twenty?" asked Harding. He smiled grimly, thinking of the change in his fortunes that had made twenty dollars from Fu Chen important. He, also, had not slept that night.

The Chinaman put an envelope on Harding's desk. It was the same that the salesman had given him, with the money, yesterday. "Yes, Mr. Bob," he said. Then, as Harding made no move to touch the money. "You count 'em."

Harding took up the envelope. Then he stared. Instead of twenty dollars, there was a pile of hundreds and tens in his hand. He glanced up in surprise at the smiling Fu Chen.

"You have 'em," observed that individual complacently. "Two thousand dollar."

Harding fingered the money and shook his head.

"I told you, Fu Chen, I couldn't take your money. Thanks, just the same, but—"

"Look!" suggested Fu Chen. He dived into a pocket and displayed a second thick roll of bank-notes, as many or more than the first. While Harding frowned in bewilderment, he explained. "I make the *big play*, Mr. Bob. Huddled-one chance. Last night." He nodded shrewdly. "Loulette gamble. The ball, him come—"

Fu Chen's arm made a graphic circle and another, narrowing to a stop over the desk. His black eyes gleamed, and he moistened his lips as if in after relish of the supreme sensation that had been his.

"The ball him come my place. I put your twenty dol-lar on gamble table. They pay me two thousan dol-lar. It belong you, Mr. Bob. You have 'em."

Harding's glance sought and held the Chinaman's. Fu Chen met his look calmly. A wiser man than Harding could not have read the thoughts behind the black eyes and wrinkled brow. It was Harding's money, repeated Fu Chen. It had been his twenty dollars. Fu Chen knew that, explained in this way, his friend must take the money without further argument.

Harding drew a deep breath. "Thanks," he said. He was going to say more, but the Chinaman was gone.

Straight to his laundry went Fu Chen. He removed his shoes, collar, and hat, and donned black silk blouse and slippers. He put his ironing board in place, and the irons on the stove.

When they were heated, Fu Chen bent over his work. He had lost several hours, and there were many clothes to be laundered.

## ALWAYS

"**A**LWAYS" is such a little word—  
To mean so much, it's quite absurd.

Yet, when I promised to love

*Always,*

What I said was true.

The trouble is:

Although I love *always,*

It isn't always

*You.*

*Coral Birch.*



# "Pizen!"

by

Chief Henry  
Red Eagle

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

## CHAPTER I.

### OUT OF THE STORM.

THE figures of two men lay half asprawl across a rude table, and the feeble rays of the guttering candle threw writhing, polymorphous shadows against the log walls of the camp. All without was black night, shrouding in its ebony blanket a vast waste of primeval woods, deep, infinite, mysterious.

Away to the northwest, a cumulating plume of dense vapor was spreading into a hydra-headed monster that was just thrusting its evil tentacles over the rim of the universe to the rumble of a thousand drums; a chameleon's tongue of white darted across the purple mist and the rising wind moaned and whistled through the tree-tops.

The smaller man stirred, lazily lifted his shaggy head away from his crossed arms and stared sleepily at his companion. As his faculties cleared and the sound of the gathering storm came to his ears, he shot to his feet and roused the other by the simple expedient of clutching his nose between his fingers.

"Hey, Zig."

The big man gave a gasping choke and opened his eyes. An angry flush surged from his bull-like neck to his forehead. His voice was a husky growl.

"Dang it, Chuck, how many times has I told ye not to wake me up thataway?"

"Storm comin' up," said the other irrelevantly. "Le's get th' camps battened. Take them on th' left."

He buckled on a yellow "greaser" and pulled away the ax-hewn door-bar. From the river came a swelling roar, and a gust of wind, laden with the breath of the snow-capped range to the north, caught the door from his fingers and hurled it wide with a bang. The candle was puffed out, and as Chuck fought the door shut, the camp was filled with eery rustlings like mice scattering to cover, as the wind sought out each nook and cranny of the moss-chinked logs.

Cursing the camps, the storm and the dark, Zig fumbled around until he found his ragged mackinaw and soon, he, too, was battling the wind.

The Bear Tooth Pulp Company's lumber-camps, on a newly acquired tract, were a man-made blot in the center of Nature's solitude; entombed in an immense sea of woods that stretched far and away like sea-combers caught and held in balance. Miles toward the north, Bear Tooth Range squatted in ugly purple against the horizon, fountain of the Musquash River that wound its turbulent way through this ligniferous wild for forty-six miles, when it joined the Pipsissewa, which led to the sea.

Ordinarily, one man is enough to watch a set of lumber-camps from the end of one season to the beginning of another, but when Boss Rod Clafin asked for volunteers,



after they had "sacked the rear" of the spring drive and were about to move into tarpaulin lean-toes in closer liaison with the moving logs, not one of the crew of sixty-four men cared to take the job.

A few, who had been members of the first crew, when they poled up the river two years ago, remembered the ghastly find of a skeleton on the river banks; supposedly that of old John Goldman, a "forty-niner" and trapper. Stuffed into the neck of a bottle was a piece of bark upon which was an almost undecipherable scrawl, because of the work of the elements. They made out a few words: "Injun—gold—Bear—fal—"

"Looks 'sif he got tangled up with a b'ar dead-fall set by Injuns, an' tried t' sign his name," said Claflin. "But that thar off laig o' hisn looks t' me 's if 'twere bruk with a bullet 'stid o' a 'fall.'"

And with this brief summary, old Rod had ordered a shallow grave to be dug for the bones. Again, last year, Claflin had left Jim Calligan as caretaker of the camps, and when the crew came in, the camps were deserted. A hunting-party found Calligan's body some eight miles up-stream. He had been shot through the head. Some thought it suicide, but others argued that the course of the bullet precluded that theory. The tragedies had gone down as being but two more to add to the unexplainable mysteries of the woods. And now they recurred as Claflin faced them.

"Thar's forty a month an' found in it. Tarnal good wages fer doin' nothin' but look arter yerself, 'cause th' amount o' work round th' camps ain't nuff to keep a hedgehog busy. All ye gotta do is eat, sleep, cut yer own wood, an' watch fer fire."

"That's th' hell o' it," muttered one. "Nothin' t' do. If thar was suthin a feller could do t' keep his mind off th' big woods an' th' lonesomeness; mebbe somebody t' talk ter once in a while, 'twouldn't be so bad. But all 'lone—" He shook his head.

Woodsmen though they were, they dreaded the long, five months' vigil, insulated as in a dark, closed tomb. The gaunt boles of the surrounding trees were as prison-bars, for beyond them stretched an abyss that approached infinitude. And over all, hung an oppressive silence—a silence so

vast, so deep, that the ears pounded as of a thousand pinions beating the air; the teeth gritted, and nerves were strained like tautened catgut. And no man cared to assume the post.

"Wall, speak up, men," roared old Rod. "You fellers as has been beefin' 'bout th' hard work o' snaggin' out spruce an' sackin' th' rear, hyar's a lazy man's job as will hit ye plumb center. Thar's a good wanigan, nothin' fancy, but grub as will stay yer stummick, an' ye can use as much on it as ye need. I'll be back with a crew o' timber-waddies long th' fust o' October."

Then Chuck Earp, clerk and scaler, had spoken.

"I'll stay for one, Rod," said he, "but not alone. I had one spell o' that up in th' Klondike, when my partner died and I lived alone for fourteen months and almost went crazy. Leave another man with me and I'll take it."

Even then only one other man had stepped forward. He was Bud Zeigler, the giant of the crew. That was two weeks ago, and already the lonely monotony had begun to cloy. They had been in this same atmosphere for seven months, and because of the small confines of the camp and too close association, the other's society irritated. Then, too, they had little in common.

Earp had a smattering of education, but through association with rough-speaking men, he dropped naturally into colloquial speech. He had been a sailor, a miner, had served one enlistment in the cavalry, and had knocked around considerable. Gambling was his forte, and when the police had raided his "joint" at Port Bragg, Earp had been driven into the pulp woods to escape the clutches of the minions of the law. So he was not actuated by any love of the woods or the "forty-a-month" compensation.

Zeigler was a woodsman. Born in the back woods, he knew the woods and little else. A hulking brute of a man, whose cycle of life was encompassed by trap, ax, and peavey. He had a shock of coarse, straw-colored hair, and his face, tight-drawn across prominent cheek-bones, was pale, like that of a "lunger," except for the hectic

smear. He had the lidless, unresponsive eyes of a halibut. He seldom joked, and his smile was a nightmare that exposed great, yellow carnivorous teeth. Bearded and unkempt, he suggested the cruel ferocity of a cave-dweller.

The storm was the forerunner of the equinoctial storms that usually struck during the vernal and autumnal period, with hurricane force. There were five other camps beside their own, and the two men collided in the "dingle" between the long bunk and cook houses.

"Right here," shouted Earp, above the rising wind.

Zeigler did not answer, but turned and made his way through the pitchy night across the chip-covered yard, toward their own camp. A greenish glare rocketed across the sky in a zigzag flame, followed by a stunning crack of thunder that seemed to split the dome of heaven; then the combined wrath of Thor and Pluvius was loosed with the roar of Niagara, and a sheet of rain, driven aslant by the rising gale, struck them fair in the face.

They battled their way to the lee of the camp until there came a lull; then rushed for the door.

Earp lit the candle that had burned down to the neck of the whisky-bottle into which it was stuck, then rummaged around in the wanigan-box for another, while Zeigler stirred up the fire, and after divesting themselves of mackinaw and "greasers" again took up their respective stools beside the rude table and smoked in silence, save for the wind-rattled smoke-stack, the beat of the rain against the "split" roof, and the steaming sizzle as a few drops seeped through and dropped on the stove. Finally Earp arose and deliberately knocked the ashes from his cob on the hearth.

"Hell, ain't it?" said he, apropos of nothing.

Zig's only answer was a grunt. His right hand grasped the bowl of his cutty—a great, freckled paw, with gnarled knuckles and horny-ridged nails; but what fascinated the eye were a dozen seed-warts that dotted the backs of both hands—dry, hard integuments that cropped into cauliflowerlike excrescences, horrible, sickening. He did not

move, but sat humped like a big toad, gazing at the stove, his fishy eyes blinking at the red glow that shone through the draft.

Before going to bed every night, Earp had a habit of drinking a cup of water, steaming-hot.

"Best natural medicine in the world," he said. "Take a cupful of hot water every night and you'll have less to pay for pills and plasters."

And summer and winter, Earp never missed his night-cap of piping-hot water. He put on the kettle to heat and took down from his bunk a birch box, beautifully worked with interwoven porcupine-quills of different colors. He had made this during the winter months, in his spare time—when he was not gambling with dice or cards—and he turned a few dollars in making little bark and quill trinkets for members of the crew. The woods abounded with porcupine, and he shot several, stripped them of their quills, and dyed them with aniline dyes that he brought in.

Now he was working on a pair of full-quilled moccasins of intricate design. His chief tool was a thin-bladed awl, some six inches long, mounted on a stag handle. With this he could often work the length of a split quill without breaking. He had learned the trick from the Blackfeet Indians while serving in the cavalry near a reservation in northern Montana.

For an hour he worked in absorbed patience by the feeble light that flickered and flared in the counter-currents as the wind forced its way through the cracks of the dried chinking; while on the other side, sat Zeigler, implacable, taciturn, smoking, smoking. His attitude was not sullen or brooding; animal-like, he seemed incapable of thought, vacant, listless.

Earp finally put away his materials, took his draft of hot water, and crawled into his bunk, and his last conscious thought before he fell asleep was that of the humped figure staring at the stove, and the bitter thought that there were to be five long, weary months of this hell-grinding monotony.

Outside, the storm raged in elemental fury, toppling weakened trees to earth, whipping and lashing its way south; the



influx swelled the stream to a turgescence, foaming maelstrom. Day dawned with no reprieve from the angry heavens and the two men hardly stirred from the camp. Zeigler had blocked out an ax-helve and now he shaped it, whittling and squinting along its length, shaving a little here and squinting again, while he consumed pipe after pipe of tobacco.

Earp cooked their simple meal, which was eaten in silence, and because Zeigler showed no inclination to do so, washed the tin dishes, rattling them loudly for the sake of hearing a noise. He "quilled" a while, played Canfield solitaire until he caught himself cheating, then hurled the dog-eared cards to the table with an oath. The inaction irked his nature and he tried to peer into the gloom. Zeigler might have been an automaton for all the emotion he showed. Mid afternoon, Earp ripped his oilskin from a peg.

"I gotta get out, Zig, storm or no storm. We need a pail of water—"

He stopped, while a look of incredulous amazement overspread his features. He had heard a knock. Again it came, more insistent than before. Even Zeigler was stirred from his lethargy as in four full strides, Earp reached and unbarred the door and a form fell across the threshold. Unmindful of the watery blast he caught the shoulders and dragged the feebly struggling figure inside. While the giant set his broad shoulders against the wide door and forced it shut, Earp assisted their visitor to a seat. It was a girl!

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SHE-DEVIL.

SHE lay back against a bunk-post with closed eyes, her bosom rising and falling with quick rhythm, her long black hair straggling, like dank sea-weed, across well-molded features from which all color had receded. The deer-skin dress was a sopping hide, and from the moose-shank moc-casins there oozed a trickle of water, slightly tinged with crimson.

"A' Injun gal," gasped Zeigler. "Whar in tarnation could she 'a' come from?"

"Don't stand there gawking. Gimme a cup o' hot tea."

"Ain't none," drawled Zig, without moving. "I dranked it all."

"Then make some," roared Earp. "There's boiling water in the kettle. Put on that rabbit-stew that was left over from dinner to heat, too."

He chafed the cold, bleeding hands of the exhausted girl, who tried, feebly, to draw them away. She did not faint, she seemed to have reached the limit of her endurance, that was all. She gulped at the hot beverage, greedily, and under its stimulating influence, she sat up and looked around dazedly. She started at sight of her hosts, whose bearded faces presented a sinister aspect in the semigloom of the cabin. Then, as her brain resumed its functions, she tried to rise.

Earp pushed her back and placed a basin of stew and a piece of bannock in her lap, and bade her eat. She attacked the food voraciously.

"Who be ye?" asked Zeigler, unable to restrain his curiosity any longer. "An' whar did ye come from?"

At his rasping demand, the girl simply shook her head and applied herself to the food.

"Guess she don't savvy English," said Earp. He moved a stool nearer the stove and motioned her to it. "Get near stove, get dry."

She huddled over the grateful warmth, and held out her emptied cup and dish for more. She scooped out the basin to the last spoonful, and returned the tins with a little nod and a smile. Gradually the color crept back into her face, then, womanlike, she began to tidy up her appearance. Her fingers braided the wet hair swiftly and she squeezed out a little water from her rain-soaked dress. Shielded by the stove, she modestly wrung out her knitted stockings, soothed her lacerated feet, and hung her moose-shanks behind the heater to dry.

A fierce gust of wind shook the camp from base-log to ridge-pole, and a loosened "split" rattled against its underlapped mate, with the staccato tap of a riveter. Now and again there sounded above the

raging forces the dull, sodden roar of the turgid stream and the splintering crash of a weakened monarch of the forest as it toppled to earth.

Zeigler had retired to his seat at the foot of his bunk, shrouded in his shell of taciturnity, the ax-handle forgotten. His fishy eyes followed the girl's every move; his pale face flushed with ulterior interest.

"By cripes!" Earp heard him mutter. "She's purty."

She made her simple toilet, and quite unconsciously she had stood on her tiptoes to hang a large bandanna over a length of hay-wire that was stretched across the log beams to dry. The wet skin-dress clung to her willowy figure, accentuating the soft, graceful curves that were molded with the beauty of an odalisque.

In profile, she did not see the giant. The fishy eyes had lost their listless luster and fairly burned; the outthrust head, the wolfish snarl that spread over his gargoyle features, added bestial force to his pose. The wire eluded her grasp by an inch, and Zeigler laid aside his pipe. Softly he crossed to her side, and before she was aware of the intention, he had grasped her under the arms and lifted her as lightly as he would a child. He did not cry out, or struggle, though her face flamed.

She reached for the stool with her foot and stood upon it. Zeigler's face cracked into what he intended for a smile.

"Why didn't ye hang yer hanky up thar—"

"Yo' big bear!" she cried. Her brown hand swung in a semicircle and landed across the big man's cheek with force enough to bring the blood rushing to the spot. The giant's eyes blinked; partly at the brow, partly at the unexpected speech, then his brow beetled; his breath was exhaled through his thick-walled nostrils, like the snort of a maddening bull.

"Ye dam' she-cat," he snarled. "Ye'll pay fer that whack."

She had jumped from the stool and now she backed away from his advancing bulk, crouching a little, her eyes darting here and there like those of a cornered weasel. Her stockinged foot caught and tripped on the uneven flooring. She twisted in mid air like

a cat and leaped aside, just as Zeigler lumbered after her and went to his hands and knees.

Before he could rise she caught up the ax-handle from the bunk and brought it crashing down on the shaggy head, and Zeigler slumped forward with a grunt. She had raised the green-maple helve to strike again, when Earp caught it from behind.

"You little she-devil, what 're tryin' to do?"

Instantly she let go and, darting to where Zeigler's belt hung from a peg, drew the big .44 from its holster. With this, she faced Earp; the steel muzzle, held waist-high, was as steady as rock; her bosom was heaving and the eyes that bored into his, glittered ophidiacally.

"Keep 'way," she panted. "I shoot."

And in the grim, compressed lips, the tense poise, Earp read determination and purpose. She *would* shoot. In spite of himself the gambler felt a burst of admiration for the self-reliant child of the woods.

"I ain't going to touch you," he said. "I jest caught this club 'fore you mashed old Zig's head into mince-meat. Mebbe he deserved it, but he didn't mean nothin'. He tried to help you."

"Yuh? I not want it that kind help. I will ask if I want help." She motioned toward the recumbent figure that lay in a tiny pool of blood from a two-inch cut in the scalp. "Put her on bunk. See if hurt much."

With a strength that was surprising, she caught the feet of the unconscious man and assisted Earp to lay him upon one of the bunks.

"Get me scissors," she ordered. "An' mak' light."

She clipped away the matted hair, poulticed the wound with tobacco-leaves that she chewed herself, then bandaged the giant's head with her own bandanna. Zeigler opened his eyes. Slowly the cobwebs cleared from his sluggish intellect and he saw her sitting at the edge of the bunk, unafraid. Earp expected a torrent of woods profanity and a renewal of the attack, but instead Zig's face cracked into the nearest semblance of a smile of which he was capable, and he patted her arm.



"Gal, ye're plumb grit, clean to th' backbone, an' I g'ess I got jest what was comin' t' me. Mebbe I mought ha' been a leetle rough an' skeered ye, comin' up behind ye thataway. Lemme up."

"No, lay still. Yo' will mak' bleed."

"Wal, if ye'll nuss me, I'll lay hyar like a cast hoss, which 'minds me that I want a drink o' water."

"Ain't none," spoke up Earp. "I'll get some." He struggled into his yellow oil-skin. "I won't be long."

"Ye needn't hurry back on my 'count, Chuck. Take yer time."

"Yuh," supplemented the girl, significantly. "An' mebbe yo' will find dead bear if he try some fonny bizness agin."

Zeigler simply grunted.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FRENCH LEAVE.

THE spring was housed, and perhaps a hundred yards back of the camps. As Earp staggered against the storm, his mind was filled with speculations regarding their visitor. Who was she? Where did she come from? What was she doing here? Where was she going? That she was self-reliant, she had demonstrated, but she apparently had no food, gun, or equipment of any kind, to combat the big woods. And the nearest settlement was seventy miles away. He gave it up.

After Earp had gone, Zeigler struggled to his elbow, then to the stool beside his bunk. His head was swirling dizzily, but, bull-like, he fought it off and asked for his pipe. The girl, who had watched him alertly, recovered the villainous cutty and when two paces away, tossed it to him. Zig sniffed.

"Don't trust me, do ye?" he asked.

"No," she answered shortly.

"Why?"

She made no reply, but busied herself about the wooden sink, until Earp returned, when she brought the big man a dipper of the muddy water. He gulped it, mud and all.

"Thanks, nuss. Say, what's yer name?"

"Noela."

"Right purty name. But who be ye, an' whar 'd ye come from?"

"Firs' 'fore I mak' answer. Can I stay in one these camp till mornin', an' will yo' sell me beans, flour, bacon, an' like that kind grub? I will pay wit' fur."

Zeigler looked at Earp and gave an almost imperceptible shake of the head that was unseen by the girl.

"Wall, I dunno," said he. "Our wanigan ain't any too well stocked; not much more 'n we'll need afore old Claflin an' his crews come in, round th' 1st o' October."

This was a lie, for the wanigan camp was stocked with staples that had been hauled in over the snow by tote-teams during the winter. The girl did not answer, but sat down on the stool beside the stove and laced on her moose-shanks.

"You ain't going out in this storm, are you?" asked Earp as she stood up.

"Yuh, I goin' Dungle' Landin' for get it grub."

"But it's seventy miles."

"I mak' it three day easy," she said nonchalantly. She might have been going out for an airing. "There is Injun trails cross country what is short cut. An' I don't care if it hunder' an' seventy, I must have it grub. I think mebbe yo' sell me jest lil for last few week."

"Ye can't do it, gal. How be ye goin' seventy mile 'thout even a knapsack o' grub?"

"I got it cache out here lil ways. My gon, fish-line, piece pork an' salt, all I need. I could live mont', six mont' if I have to."

"Wal, if ye're so sot on it, mebbe we can let ye have a leetle. I thought we mought hire ye t' cook fer us. But whar be ye campin'? Got folks hereabout?"

The girl hesitated. "I trappin' over Alder Bog way."

Alder Bog lay fifty odd miles toward the northwest, a wild, almost inaccessible region, because of half-inundated swamps that were but miry crypts of putrid mud and rotting vegetation.

"Alder Bog?" echoed Zeigler. "Then why didn't ye come out by way o' th' Pipsissewa by canoe? It's easier, an' nearer, an' thar ain't no swamps."

Again the pause, then: "Pipsissewa full

of log now. They drivin'. Le's get it supper—I hungry an' tire'. Tell me where it is grub an' I mak' yo' nice supper."

And she did. Brown slabs of delicious johnny-cake; crisp, crumbly slices of sweet bacon and fried potatoes, done to a turn. To top it off, she had found a can of molasses and she made a golden ginger-bread. She hummed a native song as she went about her work, and, uncorseted, her supple body had the free, easy grace of a gazelle.

Earp marveled at the change in his companion. The big man was almost agreeable, and his speech approached loquacity. He even tried to joke. When the meal was ready and Noela called out "Chuckaway!" he jumped up with an alacrity that reopened the wound. Noela insisted upon redressing it.

"Aw, that ain't nothin'," he said with a touch of bravado. "One time I snowshoed over thutty mile through a February blizzard with two ribs bruk an' four strips tore out o' my back, an' 'thout even a froze hunk o' bread t' eat, time I tried t' take a live b'ar out o' one o' my traps. Damn fool. Sarved me right fer tryin' sech a fool stunt." Again came that wry grimace that contorted his pasty mask.

The talk during the meal was principally about trapping. That she was not a tyro was evident in the ready manner in which she discussed, not only the snaring, but the bait, traps, and the habits of the wily furbearers. Zeigler, who had set out a few traps during the winter, brought out a small bundle of pelts. Noela sorted them skilfully, grasping them by the tail and shaking them down in order to see if the fur fell evenly, and examining the skin.

"Cure good," she said. "Yo' got it few good skin. These ones 'blue pelt,' not prime. Yo' catch her too early. An' yo' fox is kill wit' poison, not trap."

"Uhuh!" nodded Zig. "I use dough-pills o' fox-pizen. You Injuns say 'tain't good trappin', but it gits 'em, an' that's th' main p'int. I allus carry a vial o' strych in my 'kennebecker.' See, hyar."

"Too danger," remarked Noela, as Zig dug out an old stocking from his pack and carefully dumped its contents on the table; among them a small eight-ounce bottle of

the white sulfur crystals, but what caught her eye, was a heavy, round bottle.

"What that, quicksilver?" Her tone was eager; of suppressed excitement.

"Yup. I use it fer 'leadin's' in my rifle. I allus carry a leetle bottle o' that, too."

"I like buy. My rifle got it leadin's too. How much?"

"Wal, I dunno. 'Tain't much use t' me now, an' jest t' show ye that I ain't got no hard feelin's fer that joust on my haid, I'll gin ye that bottle o' marcury."

"I like pay."

"Pay, shucks." Zeigler waved his ham-like paws.

"And there's a glass jar that's half full in the blacksmith-shop that you can have, too," said Earp. "I don't know what they used it for, but it ain't any use to us, so take it."

"I like it, but I want buy."

"You have paid already. This storm made us both as ugly as dogs with a bone and you came in just in time to keep us from jumping at each other's throats. We owe you thanks, besides."

"I think big man ain't thank much," she said with a touch of contrition. "I sorry." And she patted Zeigler on the cheek. The giant flushed painfully and Earp laughed, which gave Zeigler an opportunity to mask his embarrassment.

"What ye laffin' at?" he growled. "Git a move on an' help me clean up th' dishes. We'll move over t' th' bunk-camp an' let th' gal stay hyar."

"I will wash dish', but I like have yo' mak' wanigan 'cause I want mak' early start, if stop rain. I think it let up lil now. An' I can mak' Alder Bog in two day hard tramp."

The storm had abated somewhat. The gusts of wind did not have their battering-ram force and the sheets of rain had dwindled to a steady downpour. The thunder sounded in diminuendo like empty wagons crossing a distant bridge.

"Why don't ye lay over a day or two an' rest up? Then when ye git ready t' start back, me an' Chuck will gin ye a lift part-ways."

"Yo' good mans," she said, with a



naïveté that again brought a flush into Zig's ugly countenance. "But I got it few trap out, an' I gone t'ree day 'ready."

"But ain't you afraid up there in the woods all alone, with no one within miles and miles?" asked Earp. "S'pose you should fall sick or suthin'. But—mebbe you're married."

The girl threw back her head and laughed, and her mirth was like a treeful of silver bells, shaken by the breeze. And unconsciously, both men hung upon her answer.

"Marry? No. Man what I marry must be able to tramp further as me. He must be good trapper an' have no ugly hair on her face. I ain't like it them whisker."

"I'm going to shave to-morrow," laughed Earp.

"Me, too," grunted Zig. "But Chuck's got th' right dope. Ain't ye 'fraid up thar?"

"'Fraid!" she scoffed. "What I 'fraid? The woods is my home an' my fr'en'. Will yo' mak' my pack now?"

"Oh, in th' mornin's time 'nuff. We want ye t' stay's long as ye will. An' we'll tote th' stuff over fer ye. We ain't got nothin' t' do but set round an' hate ourselves. Be a good trip fer us."

"H-m! Yo' swap yo' min', when yo' strike Hell-Sunk Swamp 'bout it 'good trip,'" Noela retorted dryly as she attacked the tin dishes; while Earp and Zeigler, with more content than they had known for months, sat and smoked. Noela chatted vivaciously as she worked, but—never for a moment did she allow Zig's big .44 to be far from her hand.

"Now, shoo," she said as she finished. "Go 'nother camp, 'cause I tire'. I want dry my dress an' I goin' bed."

Both grinned. It was a new experience for them to be ordered around by a slip of a girl, and strangely enough, both liked it. Earp took his night-cap of hot water and they retired to the long bunk-house, dug out some heavy blankets from the "blanket-wanigan," and turned in.

Alone again, they dropped naturally into the old taciturn mood and they said but little regarding their visitor, accepting the incident as a matter of course, though the mind of each was engrossed with private

speculation, in which the plucky girl played the leading rôle.

Zeigler always fell asleep while lying on his right side and the wound in his scalp interfered with that position. It began to throb also. That, and his thoughts of the girl, kept him awake long after the deep breathing of Earp in the next bunk told him that that worthy was asleep. He was just dozing off when he thought he heard the "tunk" of one of the uneven logs of the flooring as it dropped back into place, then the cautious creak of the door swinging shut.

"What's that?" cried Zig, suspiciously. "That you, Chuck?"

"Huh? Whassa matter?"

"Thought I heard somebody movin' round in hyar. One o' them prowlin' hedgehogs, mebbe." He snuggled back into the bough mattress.

It was late when they awoke. The rain had settled into a cold drizzle and a dirty gray fog hung low along the torrential Musquash that was plunging by at freshet pitch.

There was no smoke issuing from the little stack of the girl's camp, and they made their way to the river's edge to make their morning ablutions.

"She must 'a' been clean beat," said Zig when there was no reply to his repeated knock. He tried the door; it opened readily, but the camp was empty!

## CHAPTER IV.

### FROM AMBUSH.

THE girl was gone.

"Whatdya know 'bout that?" gasped Zig. "She's gi'n us th' slip."

Earp made no reply. He was examining the wanigan-box that had been looted of beans, bacon, flour, salt, and tea. In their stead was a small bundle of fur: marten, sable, mink, and muskrat; more than enough to balance.

"Mebbe we could run her down," suggested Zig. "She's got a load thar that's all o' a hundred pound, 'sides what she mought ha' mooched from th' wanigan-camp as wa'n't locked. Mebbe she made a cache whar she had th' fur hid."

"Let her go," answered Earp testily. "We told her we'd sell her some grub and take fur as pay. And you couldn't drag her back with a snag-chain if she didn't want to come. She's half wild yet."

"Wal, p'raps yer right, but—say, wonder if she took my gat. If she did—what's that? A rock?"

On the way to his bunk his foot had kicked a small pebble that rolled almost at Earp's feet, as, hunting-knife in hand, the latter bent to pick up some cedar slabs to start the fire. Earp picked up the stone and was about to toss it into the ashes when its weight caught his attention. It was of a peculiar color and when he scraped it with his hunting-knife, his eye caught a glint. He fairly leaped to the door, where he could get a better light.

"Zig, bring me your ax and that ball-hammer at the head of my bunk." Earp's voice was shaking with excitement.

"What fer?"

"Don't ask questions. Bring 'em," shouted Earp.

"Ye ain't a cripple, be ye?" roared Zeigler in turn. "Go git 'em yerself."

"Hell!"

Earp jumped and yanked the little hammer from its peg with such violence that he broke the leather thong by which it hung; then, using the face of the ax as an anvil, he tried to break the water-worn rock. It simply bent under his blows and glittered where the hammer dented.

"It's gold!" he yelled.

"Huh?" grunted Zig. "What's gold?"

"This lump. And the Injun girl brought it. She must 'a' dropped it when she fell, just afore she struck you with that ax-handle."

"Gwan. Whar in tarnation 'd th' gal git gold up hyar in Maine? Must be that thar stuff ye call fool's gold, or a piece o' yellor rock."

"Did you ever see a rock the same size as heavy as this? Heft it. Here, get me that nitric-acid you use for burning off your warts and I'll prove it."

Zeigler watched Earp apply the acid test, still unconvinced.

"That don't prove nothin'," he said dully. "If that thar acid won't burn warts

right away, 'course it ain't goin' t' make no 'pression on rock. It takes time to even eat in one o' these hyar warts."

"I tell you it's gold. I've panned it and I know. There's only 'bout two ounces in that lump, but if we can locate the girl, she may lead us to a fortune. How far is it to Alder Bog?"

Earp's eyes were blazing now. Once again the lust of gold was surging through his veins; the lust that had led him to brave the unknown dangers of the Klondike in 1897. Again he saw himself with pick, shovel, and pan; digging, washing; every stroke, every twist of the wrist an eager agony, a fever of suspense.

"Wal, I dunno," replied Zig slowly. "Sixty mile, more or less as th' crow flies, an' Hell-Sunk Swamp stuck somewhere in atween."

"What is it, a river, lake, or what?" Earp paced back and forth, breakfast, everything, forgotten. But with Zeigler, bodily comfort came first. He started to build the fire left by Chunk, squatting down on his haunches and shaving a cedar kindling.

"Answer me!" Earp roared. He caught the giant's shoulder with such violence that Zeigler was sent sprawling, and as he scrambled to his feet, knife in hand, his temper flared. He blocked Earp, who had resumed his pacing.

"Keep yer hooks offa me!" Zig's whiskers bristled, and for a second the air was charged with tragedy as the two men glared, eye to eye. Then Earp turned on his heel, with a shrug and an oath.

"For God's sake, Zig, are you human or devil? Let's not fight like a couple of dogs over a bone. If I didn't know different, I'd say you were a hop-head. This is the chance of your life, man. A chance to be rich, to live like a human being instead of being cooped up in this lonely hell-hole for a year at a time. Good Lord! Ain't you got any guts, any ambition? Let's get together and hunt up this girl. She'll make us both independent for life if we can find her. As you said, mebbe we can overtake her."

But Zeigler was applying a match to the stove, and started to get breakfast. All



during the preparation of the simple meal Earp continued to argue, without a break in the giant's taciturnity.

Suddenly Zeigler's face took on a look of pleased animation. His thoughts were of the girl herself, instead of the gold.

"Wall," said he, "I ain't got much faith in findin' any gold. I've lived hyar, man an' boy, for nigh forty year, an' I ain't never hearded o' thar bein' any gold here-about. But I'll go 'long of ye, jest fer th' sake o' gittin' 'nother squint at th' gal. I'm a good trapper, an' I can out-tromp nine out o' ten men. Mebbe if I shaved off m' whiskers—"

Mid-forenoon saw them plunging across the ridge straight through the woods toward Alder Bog. The giant knew the general topography of the country, and his huge bulk swung ahead in that long stride that covered an amazing lot of ground; the stride of the woodsman who has some objective.

Earp clung tenaciously to his heels, his energy fired with a consuming desire to reach their destination. Again he saw himself as part of that gold-crazed horde that swarmed out of Edmonton to defy the wilds of Peace River Valley and the primeval Mackenzie in that agonizing march that tested the stamina of real men; that ordeal that probed into a man's soul and ferreted out his weakness. And a large proportion of that adventurous army, finding their strength unequal to the task, had left their bones to bleach beside the trail, grim toll to the "survival of the fittest."

Then, he had trailed thousands, but this time, he was in the vanguard, the George Carmack, the Jim Marshall, of the new El Dorado, and the thought spurred him on. His stomach-muscles grew strained and sore, and his left "cruiser" was too large, so that the constant chafing made a water-blister that burst and was now raw. His pack, light enough when he started, seemed weighted with lead.

An hour before dark, they struck the lowlands that were a quagmire. The sodden bracken, rotting 'neath the melting snows, formed a soggy, slippery footing that sucked at each step and stayed their progress. The thick undergrowth, rain-laden, swished

across their faces, and when they were forced to camp by the darkness that settled swiftly, they had covered less than twenty miles.

Zeigler set about getting supper and Earp, dog-tired, keeled over where he sat and was fast asleep before the kettle boiled. When the rude fare was ready, Zig roused the tired man by prodding him in the ribs with his foot. The meal was eaten in silence.

They were early astir, and though the rain had ceased, a cold wind whined through the stunted trees. Now they wriggled through a labyrinth of scrubby spruce and twisted cedar, to which clung blotches of hairy moss and green, slimy, gelatinous lichen. The thick, perennial growth overhead spread a dun pall, like the ghostly shadows of a gloomy cathedral.

Here and there were little patches of snow, as yet unreached by the feeble rays of the sun, that could not penetrate this vast crypt. Sphagnum moss and herbaceous plants of water-loving nature abounded; while from the mud that squelched beneath their weight, then gurgled like boiling gruel when they withdrew their feet, rose a musty stench as of miasmatic putrefaction. For two hours they wallowed through this, then Zeigler stopped and consulted the trembling needle of his compass.

"By gad, Chuck, I b'lieve we're in Hell-Sunk Swamp. It's eighteen mile straight acrost, or we can tromp back to th' aidge o' it an' swing due east till we strike th' Pipsissewa, then foller north. What say?"

"How far is it to the Bog that way?"

"All o' fifty mile. Ye see, we make 'most a ha'f-circle thataway. Th' Bog lays 'bout fifteen mile t'other side o' th' swamp."

"And if the Pipsissewa is flooded, which most likely it is after the rain, we ain't any better off than if we go straight ahead. And we save twenty miles."

Without a word, Zeigler shifted his pack to an easier position and plunged into the boscage.

And two days later, ragged and foot-sore, they sighted the little camp at the upper end of the Bog, which was not a bog at all, but a tranquil pond surrounded by high, up-flung ridges. The "split" roof of

the mud-chinked camp was sagging and the clearing in which it stood was overgrown with rank, dead weeds and small bushes. It had been abandoned for at least three years.

Earp swore. Not the profane exclamation of quick anger, but deep, sonorous oaths of chilling blasphemy that embraced the girl, his luck, and the swamps. And through his years of association with the alluvial dregs of human scum in various parts of the world, his vocabulary was large and forceful.

Zeigler had now assumed his usual impassive mien, after his first disappointment, and set about getting their evening meal with the succinct remark:

"If I could 'a' just seen her, I'd say th' trip was wurth it."

Earp raved. "She's somewhere in this region, that's a living cinch, and I'm going to find her if it takes ten years. She's some wise little squaw, to steer us 'way up here so's to allow her time to make her getaway, in case we did try to foller her to her diggin's. What do you think?"

Zig didn't even look up, but sat humped like a huge frog gazing at the coals, while he waited for the kettle to boil.

"And she knows something of mining, else why did she want all that quicksilver? You know that they use quicksilver in sluice-rifles to catch the 'color.' And she said that she wanted it for 'leadin's.' We're prize boobs."

"Eat," grunted Zig.

He guzzled the pouchong and gulped at his bannock and bacon, his throat contracting and dilating with boalike elasticity, oblivious, seemingly, to his partner's ranting. It was this apatheticism that was maddening, and Earp threw up his hands in sullen disgust.

After a rest of two days, during which Earp did some desultory prospecting without result, they started back; traveling by easy stages because of Earp's lame foot. Reaching camp, Zeigler bethought himself of an otter trap that he had set in a "slide" above their site.

The Musquash had receded somewhat, though still high, its waters muddy and strong. Washed high by the flood on a

sharp turn, Zig found the broken bark of a swamped canoe. He merely prodded it with his foot and resumed his way. Swamped canoes might have been an everyday occurrence with him for all the emotion he showed.

But he pondered over the swamped craft in his oxlike way. It was well nigh impossible to paddle, or even pole a canoe against that turgid current and gradually his sluggish intellect associated the bark with the girl, and she had come from up-stream. It was not, however, until they had "turned in" that Zig mentioned the incident to Earp. The latter fairly leaped out of his bunk.

"And you—" he choked. "By dam', Zig, you're enough to drive a man crazy. Why didn't you tell me this before? We might have had half a day's start by now."

"Ain't no call to hurry," mumbled Zeigler. "We got all summer to ketch her. She—"

"She? I ain't thinkin' of her. It's what she means if we find her and her diggin's, 'cause that nugget was placer-rock. And the sooner you get to thinking my way 'stead of the girl, the better. That woods chicken is a whole lot wiser 'n she looks. She ain't buried up here with nothin' to look forward to but the wife of some woodsman. Take it from me."

And Earp lit the candle and filled his knapsack with food for another expedition. When he finished, Zeigler's regular breathing told him that the giant was asleep.

He was up before daylight, and roused the big man, whose deliberation filled Earp with a desire to leap upon the ponderous dolt and batter him soundly with his fists. He was champing to be off an hour before Zeigler was ready, importuning, commanding; but he might as well have spent his breath toward the bole of the hackmatack against which he leaned, for all the effect it had.

On the morning of the third day they approached Bear-Tooth Range, which, purple-hued at a distance, now loomed like a gray wall. Far below in a cleft that might have been done with the irregular hackings of a giant ax the Musquash pounded its



turgid way seaward. There came to their ears the hollow roar of falls and from a promontory they overlooked a small basin.

They picked their way down the precipitous wall, taking advantage of crevices and the bulging sides, and had reached a wide bench that jutted from the cliff, mapping out their route, when Zig said:

"I been a thinkin', Chuck, that it's tarnal funny that thar ain't any signs o' a trail. I don't b'lieve th' gal's up thisaway at all, 'cause if she were we'd 'a' seen some sign o' her."

"But th' canoe—"

"Mought 'a' been a bluff t' throw us off, same's Alder Bog. Less 'n we git some sartin proof that she's hyar, I'm goin' back—"

There was a menacing whine that culminated in a vicious spat as a bullet ricocheted on the rock wall and "zinged" on its murderous way. The crack of the rifle echoed and reechoed from the crags, its source lost in the repercussion.

Both ducked and wriggled on their stomachs to the shelter of a jagged boulder, and waited. Speaking in husky whispers they retreated, and exposing themselves as little as possible, they finally regained the top. The shot did not deter them—rather the contrary. They rounded the ridge and came upon a deer runway that led toward the river, and followed it cautiously.

From a high point they spied the river and saw two skin teepees pitched on its banks.

"We've got her," exulted Earp. "Come on."

He had drawn his gun when Zeigler laid one of his warty paws on his arm.

"Put it up. We ain't goin' t' do no shootin'."

"But s'pose she—"

"No shootin', I said."

Earp turned and looked at Zig, who stared him back without blinking, and with a shrug Earp sheathed his revolver. Trembling a little he scrambled down the rough path like a big bear, while behind him lumbered Zig, his pale face flushed, his fishy eyes shining with eagerness and expectation.

"Hurry," panted Earp. "And keep

them tins from rattling against that pick-head."

He stopped so suddenly that Zeigler, following close on his heels with head bent, rammed into him with force enough to send both staggering.

Zip ripped out an oath.

"What ja stop—"

He blinked, for, standing less than ten feet away, was an old Indian—and the rifle he held was at full cock.

## CHAPTER V.

### LUST OF GOLD.

HIS seamed, leathery visage was cast in grim lines and his teeth bared as he barked:

"Stan' still!"

They stood. He gave a slight nod over their shoulders, and Noela, who had been covering them from behind a big boulder, stepped forward and relieved them of their shooting-irons, then produced a length of rawhide from about her waist and proceeded to tie their wrists behind their backs. Covered by the steely bore in the hands of the old Indian, Earp was forced to submit first, and she did a very businesslike job of it.

"Stan' over there!" she ordered. As Earp passed Zig, he muttered from the side of his mouth:

"Jump her."

"Try it," challenged the sharp-eared girl. "It be yo' las' jump."

"Now, go back, way yo' come," ordered the old man, after he had examined the knots.

"But we ain't—"

"Go back, an' don't talk." The words were hissed rather than spoken, and they had no recourse but to obey. The Indian spoke a few hasty words to Noela in his native tongue and she abruptly vanished in the woods.

Silent, watchful, his black eyes alert to their every move, the old Indian, Clawfoot, brought up the rear. Occasionally the muzzle of his gun would prod Earp in the back as a signal for him to close up on Zeigler in front.

Now it became clear how the girl had been able to carry away her heavy wani-gan, and the noise Zig had heard in the bunk-camp. Clawfoot had taken refuge from the storm and laid quiet in one of the sixty bunks, until he thought they were asleep.

Noela was waiting for them when they reached the summit, a blanket and a small sack of food strapped to her back, and without a word or sign trotted ahead. Save for the heavy breathing, the occasional snap of a twig and the clank of pick-head on the spade or cooking-tins, there was no sound from the file. Zeigler plodded along, feasting his eyes upon the willowy Noela, his features reflecting no chagrin or anger; rather of pleasure and content. But Earp, seething with inward rage, growled like a bear with a trap-chewed paw. Once or twice he tried to argue, but a forceful jab in the small of his back from the rifle-barrel silenced him.

They reached the river again below the gorge, and on a smooth ledge that was reached by a narrow path and which commanded a view, both up-stream and down, of a hundred yards. Behind them loomed a high wall, before them boiled the rapacious Musquash.

Noela flung off her pack and built a fire. She pooled the food from both sacks and untied Earp and Zeigler while they ate, with Clawfoot, grim as a stone Buddha, standing guard. And, save for the savage mutter of the river, all with that uncanny silence that wore the temperamental Earp to frenzy.

Darkness settled with that mysterious softness characteristic of spring, and the light from the fire played on Clawfoot's saturnine features, accentuating the deep furrows and cruel lines by the flickering shadows. Finally Earp could contain himself no longer.

"Lissen—"

"Don't talk!" snapped Clawfoot.

Noela said something in an undertone to which the old redskin made no reply.

"What yo' want?"

Earp glanced at the stern visage of the old warrior as if waiting corroborative assent.

"Go 'head, he hear what yo' say."

"Well, I've just been thinking this thing over. What do you intend to do with us now?"

"Take yo' to camps."

"And then? Leave us there?" She nodded.

"I thought so. Now what's to prevent us from going out to Dungle's Landing or even Port Bragg and bring back a hundred, yes, a thousand men? All I'd have to do is to show them this nugget that's in my pocket, and they'd come a running, hell-bent."

"Stan' up!" Her nimble fingers flew over his pockets until she discovered the one containing the nugget. With a little smile of triumph, she transferred it to a pouch in her leather belt. "I lose it in yo' camp. Now, how yo' goin' show it nugget?"

"Well, I don't have to show anything. Some of them will take a gambling chance and come anyway. Inside of two weeks there'd be a stampede for these diggin's of an army of gold-crazed men that would jump your claim, unless it's legally staked out, and chances are it ain't. Then where would you be?"

"I shoot." Clawfoot's grip on the rifle tightened, and the piercing eyes glittered.

"Sure you would and you might get a few of us, but sooner or later, one of us is going to get you. Two of you can't watch all points of the compass; your grub is going to give out some time and you can't work your claim and stand guard, too. 'Course you might kill me and Zig, but next fall, when Clafin and his crews come back, they'll scour these woods till they find our bones, same's they did them of Goldman and Calligan—"

Noela's face went hard. "Goldman was steal. My father was trap on Alder Bog an' Goldman had camp near fork of Musquash an' Pipsissewa. That five year ago an' I was in convent, but he find my father workin' shinin' sand, an' they mak' partner. One night Goldman strike my father wit' shovel an' take all grub an' gold. He try run quick rapids wit' canoe an' he swamp. He lose it all gold an' break her leg on rocks. My father live on berry an' nuts



an' foller river an' he find Goldman where he die, 'cause he lose it grub, too. That other man is rob our traps an' try shoot my father first."

"Sarved 'em right," said Zig heavily.

"But old Rod ain't going to stop at finding our carcasses. He's going to find out who or what did it. And sooner or later, they're going to stumble onto you. Mebbe this is their land and they'll drive you out."

There was silence at this, for they knew that he spoke the truth.

"Well, what all this?"

"Here's my proposition. Let me and Zig take up a claim next to yours, or where we won't interfere with you, and let us work. We ain't anxious to let in anybody else if we can help it, and we can work at least four months before Clafin's crews come in. We'll furnish the grub from our wanigans and you can do the cooking to pay your share."

"An' if we don't."

"Then you might as well kill the both of us right now," replied Earp boldly, "for if we can't get in alone, then we intend to get in with a hundred. There's prob'ly enough gold in that sluice for all of us, and it's better for you to take a quarter share than a hundredth, or none at all."

The girl consulted her father. The old Indian shook his head aggressively, his gestures and tone were eloquent of passion and emphatic disapproval, and he eyed his prisoners balefully.

Earp fell asleep, but Zeigler lay awake a long time watching the play of Noela's features by the firelight, until she caught up her blanket and stretched her length on the hard ledge for a few hours' sleep before she took her turn to watch, while her father slept.

Alone with his thoughts, the old Indian had to admit the force of Earp's argument. The white man's incursion was but a matter of time, and he had no wish to slay. He had been a fool not to have gone out to Port Bragg to restock his wanigan as he had always done, and now he would have to bow to the inevitable.

After all, if he was forced out, he and his Noela could live comfortably with what he

had cached of the "shining sand." He still retained his allotment at the 'Quoddy reserve, and, though it had been nearly twenty years since he had flung himself from the council-fire in a fit of anger, when he denounced them all as spineless, because they had voted to erect schools and churches that their children might be better equipped to combat the newer element of so-called civilization, saner thought had forced the hard-headed old warrior to admit that they had been right.

He had guarded his secret here deep in the woods, and as last of his line he had vowed to carry it to his grave, after he had secured enough to insure comfort for himself and that of his girl. It was hard, but he had no choice. It was much better to share with two than a hundred, perhaps thousands.

Accordingly when Noela awoke to relieve him, he told her of his decision. But the *wanutch* must allow him to keep all the guns and ammunition; they must furnish food; and, above all, they must not betray his decision under penalty of death.

"*Wa-layo* ('Tis well)," said Noela.

And both Earp and Zeigler had eagerly agreed to the conditions. So it was that a week later they again approached the Indian camp loaded with food and tools from Clafin's stores; the girl, with the aid of a tump-line, carrying a man's load.

Earp, a veteran of the Klondike and Yukon, was surprised at the crude equipment. The river-bed was of fine gravel, black sand, and clay, with a ten-foot beach that seemed ideal. A twenty-foot sluice of ax-hewn boards was built on a slight slant to the river. Perhaps half-way, in this trough was a rude sieve made of interwoven hay wire that prevented the coarse pebbles of the pay dirt from passing through.

Below this were a series of intersticed cleats nailed with wooden pegs; ahead of these riffles was sprinkled mercury to catch the gold particles by amalgamation.

A scooped cedar piped a running stream for "wash" through the sluice, which could be diverted by simply removing the cedar trough. And this was the "leadin's in her riffle" that Noela had referred to.

"Goldman mak' it," said the girl.

Earp and Zeigler lost no time in getting to work. Even while Zig was pitching their tent, Earp took his pick and shovel and washed out a pan of dirt and was rewarded with a few grains of "color." Not much, true, but enough to encourage. With a whoop he rushed to the camp-ground and showed the shining particles to Zeigler, who had begun to absorb some of his partner's enthusiasm, and he threw himself into the grueling work with an ardor that surprised and pleased Earp.

Twice their "patches" gave out and they moved farther up-stream, and as their poke grew day by day the fever burned its way into the big man's veins. He insisted on an equal division each night, and growled like an ugly bear if the day's pan was small. He learned to wash the dirt himself, and it was agreed that each man should keep what he had panned in order to avoid the nightly argument.

But never was the giant too busy but that he could stop and carry a pail of water from the river or chop up a stick of firewood for Noela. He looked forward, with gusto, to the evening meal and the aftersupper pipe about the camp-fire, when the talk invariably turned to trapping.

He seemed metamorphosed into a different individual. His pale face took on color and he crawled out of his shell of taciturnity and related anecdotes of trapping in which he became egotistic, but displayed a dramatic intensity that was certainly compelling.

On the other side of the fire, old Clawfoot smoked his calumet and dried "squawbush" bark, while now and again the crow's feet about his eyes would deepen. That was his laugh.

At these times Earp felt decidedly out of place, for his knowledge of trapping was confined to the snaring of an occasional rabbit. He would plead being tired and betake himself to his tent, long before Zeigler fumbled at the flaps.

But—never for a moment did the old warrior relax his vigilance. His rifle was always near his hand and the beautiful Noela was always under his watchful eye.

Twice they made the long trip to Claflin's

camps to replenish their wanigan, and the refreshing Noela, with her pack-basket and head-strap, did a man's work. Her rounded body was as hard as that of a trained athlete's, and she seemed almost tireless.

By the 1st of September, Earp and Zeigler had a poke of nearly a thousand dollars, with a growing lust for more, and the time was nearing when Rod Claflin and his crew of timber waddies would bateau up the Musquash. Then, either they must share their secret, or take up their duties as lumberjacks.

The first would be disastrous, physically as well as financially, for they knew that Clawfoot would never rest until he "got" one or both of them. The second, they had no real liking for. After conferring with Noela and Clawfoot, it was decided by a vote of three to one, Zeigler voting to the contrary, to go out to the camps. Their supplies were giving out, anyway, and Earp and Zeigler would welcome Claflin as though they had been there all the time.

Both would then quit, stock up with food at Port Bragg with the money due from Claflin, then tote it across country to Bear Tooth Falls. Except for an occasional trapper or lumber-explorer, no one ever traveled that way, so the chance of discovery was small. It was decided to go the following week, Zeigler giving in sullenly.

From then on, he was as one obsessed. He was up at the first streaks of dawn and worked feverishly till dark, barely halting to eat. Whereas, before, he cached his poke, now he carried it with him and guarded it jealously.

One night, when Earp was adding his day's panning to his little hoard, he caught the giant eying the leather bag greedily. Earp shifted his hiding-place the next day. And when Earp mentioned the fact that their food was reduced to half a strip of bacon, corn-meal and flour, and that they would have to move a day sooner than they intended, Zeigler flew into a bellowing rage.

While the others made preparations for the three-day trek, Zeigler spent the day grubbing in the river-bed, mumbling savagely into his matted beard, his sun-bleached locks straggling across his drawn,



pasty face, his outthrust, gorillalike head almost buried in the shallow pan as he washed and scanned the residuum. To Noela's hail of "chuckaway," he merely waved his hand and worked until it was too dark to see. They had finished their meager meal when he finally came in and sullenly attacked his rude fare.

Earp retired to do some long-neglected darning. The candle burned low before he had finished, and he made his way to the Indian camp to get another. At the edge of the clearing he paused to hail the camp, for it was a rule of Clawfoot's that they should not approach the camp at night without warning, else he would assume that they were on mischief bent.

Clawfoot and Zeigler were sitting beside the fire and conversing in lowered tones. Noela was nowhere in sight; evidently she had retired to her own teepee. Something in the attitude of the two men caused Earp to dodge behind a tree and watch.

He saw Zeigler produce his leather pouch, the contents of which Clawfoot dumped into a piece of smooth, tanned skin, and as the fire licked at a pitched fagot and blazed, the yellow pile glittered and sparkled into a million particles of light.

Satisfied that there was no adulteration, the old warrior, with the ever-present rifle in hand, went to his moose-hide teepee and brought out his own pouch and a primitive set of scales, made of a stick, birch-bark and babiche. They were perfectly balanced, however. He weighed the two bags and his own weighted that of Zeigler's. The crow's-feet at the corners of his beady eyes shriveled into furrows. Zig swore.

"Yo' need it 'bout half-pound more," grunted Clawfoot.

Zeigler's answer was lost in a savage growl as he snatched his pouch from the brown claw and hurled himself from the fire.

Earp just had time to crawl into his blanket and feign sleep when Zeigler, still swearing under his breath, crowded his bulk into the tent. Earp mulled the camp-fire incident over and over. Evidently Zeigler's object was to equal the Indian's poke.

But why? It struck him with startling force. As the old-time Indians demanded

blankets, horses, and land for the hands of their children in marriage, so Clawfoot was demanding a dowry of gold for Noela.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DEATH WINS.

THE trip to Claflin's camps was made without incident, except that Zeigler "bulled" the pace. As on the previous occasion Noela and her father were ensconced in the long bunk-camp where a canvas tarpaulin partitioned off a space in the rear for the girl.

The sun was crossing the celestial equator, and the autumnal winds, colloquially called "line gales," were about due. All day the sky had been overcast and threatening.

Noela and her father retired early, as they intended to return to Bear Tooth Falls on the morrow. Earp put on the kettle of water to heat and got out his materials for quilling and plied the long-bladed awl industriously; while Zig, his stockinged feet cocked up on the hearth, smoked and smoked, buried in somber thought. Suddenly he cleared his throat with a rasping hawk.

"Chuck, how much we got comin' to us from old Rod? 'Course we're goin' t' charge him jest th' same's if we was hyar all th' time."

"Certain. The only thing hard to square is the 'mount of grub we got away with. At forty a month, I figger that I got 'bout five hunderd coming to me for the year, less my wanigan bill for socks, tobacco, and such."

"Yuh, that's what I make it. An' that's 'bout twenty-five ounces o' dust, ain't it?"

Earp nodded and Zig continued:

"I tell ye what I'll do. I'll gin ye a order on Rod Claflin for my time from October 1 o' last year to October 1, o' this year an' make 'good my own wanigan bill, for ten ounces o' yer dust. What do you say?"

Earp laid aside his awl and thoughtfully filled his pipe and lit it without answering. He was weighing Zeigler's proposition and wanted to draw him out.

"Wall, spit it out. Yes or no," said Zig impatiently.

"What do you want with ten ounces more, 'way up here?"

Zig darted him a quick glance. "That ain't none o' yer bizness," he said sullenly. "I jest want it, that's all."

"How are you going to pay your share of the grub-stake if you make over your time to me?"

"I thought mebbe you'd stand it an' lemme pay out o' th' fust I take out."

"Oh, you did!" retorted Earp sarcastically. "How do I know you'll make good? You might die or—"

"If I croaked then you'd git it anyway, 'cause what I don't git, thar'll be all th' more fer you. Ye can't lose. Me an' you are two o' four, as knows 'bout that thar place, an' we've took out clus t' three hundred a month. An' while ye're my partner, I don't want ye hornin' in my pussonal 'fairs, so don't ask questions."

"See here, Zig, I know what you want ten ounces more for. I ain't blind. But take my advice and forget it. She's pretty, but—"

Zeigler's great paw closed over his shoulder and his whiskers bristled.

"Car'ful, 'fore ye say suthin' ye can't take back," he warned. "Th' old man is willin' t' have me fer a son-in-law, an' I ain't cut out fer no highfalutin life same's ye tell 'bout in th' cities. I'm a woodsman, born an' bred, an' a nice leetle home at Dungle' Landin' is nearer my idee o' livin'."

"You say that the old man is willing, but is she?" asked Earp. In spite of himself he felt a twinge of jealousy.

"She'll have t' be. Hyar's my plan. Ye noticed that old Clawfoot brought out all th' pelts they had? Th' gal caught th' most on 'em an' I'm goin' t' gin 'em my bundle o' skins, too. They go to Dungle' Landin' t' trade 'em an' wait fer me thar. Soon's Rod brings in his crew, an' he's due 'most any day now, me an' you quits, sayin' that we want a whirl at th' city an' paint it red, which is nateral, 'count o' us bein' cooped up hyar fer a whole year, an' we go out t' th' Landin' whar me an' th' gal git hitched. Clawfoot says thar's a spotted trail as leads 'crost country an'

strikes th' Musquash jest foot o' th' gorge, an' we can come in thataway. But I need 'bout ten ounces o' dust, fust."

"Why not wait until after we come back with our wanigan? You can dig ten ounces of your own inside of a month."

"I want it now," said Zig doggedly, his voice rising with his mounting anger. "An' I'll trade, fight, or gamble t' git it. Why won't ye take my order? Ye know I got it comin', an' ye know old Rod is good fer it. We can tell him that ye beat me out o' it, gamblin'. Now what's th' defugelty?"

"Rod knows you ain't a gambling man, and I doubt if he'd make good if he knew it was a gambling bill. Besides, I want all of my dust and as much more as I can get, and I tell you what I will do. You said that you'd trade, fight, or gamble. I don't want to trade for your time, and I wouldn't stand a ghost of a show with you in a rough-and-tumble. But we're both got 'bout fifty ounces. You divide your poke in five equal piles and I'll gamble for one or all of them with dice, cards, or any way that gives both a fair show."

It took some time for this proposition to sink into the slow-working brain of the giant, then his warted fist banged on the table. The stakes were big, but he was playing for a big stake.

"'Greed," he boomed. "But ye've played sol'ta're with them frazzled cards so much that ye know every one on 'em by lookin' at th' backs. Yer dice is loaded, 'cause ye told me so yerself. I'll match ye with coins, no less than five plays an' no more 'n ten."

"'Right," assented Earp. He removed his quilling materials to a stool beside the table, and, trembling with the gambling fever, he got out his pouch and made of its contents five equal piles, spread on thin bark.

Zeigler brought his "kennebecker" over to the table and placed it beside him on the long "deacon seat." The ten piles of yellow metal glinted dully in the feeble light of the candle, and each man measured the other's hoard with envious eyes.

Zeigler's hands were steady enough, but now his halibutlike eyes were as pin-points of fire; his face flushed, giving him an un-



healthy, mottled appearance. Earp was pale, his hands trembled, and he breathed deeply. They played with big Canadian copper and watched narrowly.

At the end of five hands, Zeigler had won the first and fourth and Earp the other three. The latter raked in the last stake with a sigh of relief. Gambler though he was, two hundred dollars on the turn of a coin was an agony of suspense. His tongue and throat were parched dry with the excitement, and to steady his nerves he poured himself a dipper of water from the steaming kettle on the stove and set the half-emptied cup beside him. Two hundred to the good, he rubbed his sweaty hands together gleefully.

"Wanta quit?" he taunted with a grin.

For answer, Zig pushed out a chip of bark loaded with ten ounces of dust and shook his coin between cupped palms. He lost three in succession, leaving him with but one pile, loser of eight hundred, a small fortune to him; yet he was the calmer of the two. He played with oxlike deliberation, while Earp was quick and jerky.

Zeigler was the better gambler because he could win or lose without outward emotion, but inwardly he was seething. Once or twice his eyes roved toward his opened kennebecker beside him.

They were unaware of the rising wind that swooped down the watercourse and rattled the little shack; nor were they aware that a figure, in passing the window, had caught sight of the littered gold and was now peering through a crack in the chinking. The late burning candle had excited Clawfoot's curiosity.

Nerves like tautened catgut, their minds were so engrossed in the game that when the kettle boiled over, both jumped as if shot. It continued to sizzle and steam and Earp rose to take it off. The metal handle had become heated, so he pulled down the tattered sleeve of his shirt to protect his hand, and from the corner of his eye, he caught the shadow of Zeigler's quickly withdrawn hand that had hovered for a second over on Earp's end of the table. One of his piles had a slight scoop in it as if some had been taken. He dropped

the kettle and in two jumps he was beside the table, blind with rage.

"You damn dirty skunk!" he yelled. "Put back that pinch of dust you mooched from my pile."

Zig started to rise, with a growl in his chest, his face working, his hamlike paws gripping the sides of the table. Once those great fingers curled around his windpipe, Earp could expect no mercy. His wild eyes roved for a weapon and they lighted on his steel quilling-awl. He clutched at this frenziedly, overturning the stool and scattering the quills.

"I didn't—"

One of the needlelike quills drove into the giant's shoeless foot. He gave a startled glance downward and Earp lunged forward with all his weight behind the thrust of the awl. The sharp, triangular point struck Zeigler in the temple and drove its way to the brain. His grip on the table prevented him from falling. Instead he slumped down on the bench, his face buried in the yellow dust, the awl still protruding, grotesquely, from his head.

Earp went sick at the sight and to prevent the rising nausea, he caught up the half-filled dipper and drained it at a gulp. He felt it curdling its way to his stomach. His eyes gradually widened, his mouth fell agape, and he tried to steady himself. A convulsive twitch racked his frame, and with a strained groan he stiffened, half turned, and sprawled across the table. The spasms ceased. Gripped in the hands of Zeigler was an empty eight-ounce vial of "fox-pizen," strychnin sulphate. A few grains were yet undissolved in the dipper.

Ten minutes later, after they had gathered up the scattered gold, two figures were feeling their way through the murky night toward Bear Tooth Falls. On the well-molded features of one was a look of relief; on the leathery visage of the other a smile.

The figures of two men lay half asprawl across a rude table, and the feeble rays of the guttering candle threw writhing, polymorphous shadows against the log walls of the camp. All without was black night, shrouding in its ebony blanket a vast waste of primeval wood, deep, infinite, mysterious.

(The End.)

# The Patient That Wasn't

by

## Keene Thompson



### I.

IT was characteristic of Mrs. Willoughby that her cheeks did not blanch nor her knees quake with fright, as her listening ears again detected that faint metallic scraping at the front door.

Alone in the apartment on the maid's day out, and counting the silver in the dining-room, her first thought was what would have flashed into the mind of any woman under the same circumstances; a flat-sneak was trying to break in.

Very quietly, the still pretty and girlishly slender lady replaced the knives and forks and spoons in her hands in the felt-lined drawer of the sideboard. Then, stepping back into the room—she waited.

Almost immediately her tense pose relaxed. The doubtful crease remained between her brows, however. The key she had heard inserted in the lock was guided by her husband's hand. But what could have brought him home at that hour in the afternoon?

"Why, Henry—" She stopped short in the doorway. "Henry! What's happened?"

With both hands groping along the wall to aid his tottering legs in supporting him, her spouse was advancing toward her down the hall as though the "p" in the word was silent. And yet Henry Willoughby had never touched a drop of any stimulant stronger than tea in all the fourteen years

of their married life, to his wife's positive knowledge. She accepted the evidence of her keen nose, as she helped him off with his overcoat, that his record for abstemiousness was still unbroken.

"What is it? Tell me, quick!"

He passed his hand dazedly across his forehead.

"I'm down with something; don't know what," he thickly explained. "Came on me all of a sudden, 'bout two hours ago. Had to shut m' desk and quit office. Chills and fever; ache in every bone; so weak and dizzy can hardly stand—grippe, maybe, or 'tack typhoid. Anyway, I'm sick."

That he admitted it, who usually made light of his own and others' ailments, was enough to guarantee what his appearance indicated—that he was really ill. And his wife bustled into action.

"You go right to bed," said she, "and I'll telephone for Dr. Hilton at once."

Giving the girl at the switchboard in the down-stairs hall of the apartment house the physician's number, she waited at the wall-phone in the tiny reception room off the living-room. A minute passed. She moved the receiver-hook up and down. No heed was paid to that signal of her impatience. Another minute, two, dragged by. And then she heard the quick, tired voice of a central operator.

"What number did you call?"

Mrs. Willoughby repeated it, slowly and distinctly.



"River 90933," the girl parroted after her, with the usual senseless rolling of the "r" in three—as if that numeral could possibly be confused with any other. "One moment, please."

Sighing, Mrs. Willoughby resigned herself to wait at least sixty of them longer.

"River 90933 doesn't answer," the bored feminine voice at the other end of the wire informed her.

"Doesn't answer!" the lady incredulously exclaimed.

"No, ma'am. There's been a short-circuit, or some other damage to the line. It 'll be repaired as soon as possible, but the phone is temporarily out of order."

Mrs. Willoughby hung up. Since she couldn't reach their regular physician by telephone, perhaps she ought to call up the one who lived on the ground floor of the building. But she knew nothing of his skill, while Dr. Hilton had proved his to her own and her husband's satisfaction. And the latter's case might be one that should be taken into competent hands at once, if he was to escape a long siege of sickness. She hastened into his room to look after him.

Henry was already in bed, with the covers drawn up to his ears and his face turned to the wall. His clothes were piled in a careless heap on the chair in front of the bureau. If he was aware of the fact that his wife was standing at his side, he did not lift his head or open his eyes to show it.

"Feeling any better?" she inquired solicitously. "Can I get you anything; a glass of water, or a hot-water bag for your feet?"

He made no answer; not even by a nod or a shake of his head. Bending over him, she placed her hand on his feverish brow. His pulse, as she took his wrist in her hand to count it, was excitedly racing. His breathing was heavy, and sounded labored. She covered him up snugly again.

But how peculiar, that he should go on lying there without stirring, without a word! She felt of his hot forehead again. Still her touch failed to bring him out of the stupor into which he seemed to have sunk.

This was serious, Mrs. Willoughby told herself as she straightened. She would have to get into her things and run around to Dr. Hilton's. Ten minutes was all it would take her to go to the physician's house and return. Her husband would be all right where he was in the mean time. And she could leave a note pinned to the pillow beside his head, to let him know where she had gone and that she was coming right back, in case he should wake up during her brief absence.

In her snug-fitting velvet tam, overshoes and fur coat—for the two days' snow-storm that had ended that morning had been followed by one of the freezing spells for which New York's winter climate is justly infamous—she took a final look at him. And then she went quickly and quietly out of the apartment.

Exactly twelve minutes had elapsed, by the clock on the mantel in the living-room, when Mrs. Willoughby put her key cautiously into the lock and opened the door only wide enough to admit her, closing it softly again. The ticking of the timepiece was all that disturbed the silence of the apartment. It was just as she had left it—or so it seemed.

She tiptoed down the hall to the half-open door of her husband's room, and peeped in. And then she swung the door wide open and stepped across the threshold.

"Henry!"

There was no response. Her husband was no longer lying in the bed. And yet it was strange that a man as sick as he had appeared to be could have risen from it unaided.

She went into the dining-room, and through it into the kitchen, the maid's room, her own bedchamber, the bath-room and the reception and living rooms. Henry wasn't there.

But this passed belief. He couldn't have got up and gone out of the house during the short space of time that she had been away from it. Not without being gathered into the arms of the police, at least. For there were his clothes still lying on the chair where he had left them.

She hesitated for a moment, and then went into the room to examine the win-

dow. It was locked securely on the inside. So was every other one in the apartment, as she went through it again to find out. The dumb-waiter door was also fastened on the kitchen side. So he couldn't have fallen down the shaft, or out of any one of the windows, in an attack of vertigo.

She went to the telephone.

"Will you ask Lester to come up, please?" she requested of the young woman at the switchboard.

Opening the front door of the apartment, she listened to the whirring of the elevator cables as the car ascended in response to her summons. The door rolled back, and a trimly uniformed West Indian youth stepped out.

"Yes, Mrs. Willoughby?" He spoke with the politeness and perfect enunciation of one of the characters in an English drawing-room comedy.

"Have you seen Mr. Willoughby go out?"

"Why, no; not since I took him up fifteen or twenty minutes ago." The hall-boy's eyebrows were raised in mild surprise. "He said he wasn't feeling well, as I could easily see for myself was the case—"

"You're sure," the lady broke in, and then she stopped, with an impatient shake of her head. "But, of course, you'd know it if you took him down in the elevator. There are the stairs, though—"

"It would be impossible for your husband or any one else to leave the building in that way, Mrs. Willoughby," the young man pointed out. "Due to the settling of the house, the steps were in such bad condition that the building commissioner ordered them repaired last week, if you remember. The workmen are busy now between the third and second floors; and no one can go either up or down the stairway beyond that point."

Mrs. Willoughby thoughtfully took her trembling lower lip between her thumb and forefinger.

"I wish you'd go down as far as that, Lester, and see if you can find—find anybody," said she. "Please don't stop now to ask any questions, but hurry!"

The hall-boy obeyed. He reported, up-

on his return, that the stairs were empty. Mrs. Willoughby uncertainly regarded the flight leading up to the roof. Accompanied by the obliging elevator operator, she mounted to the top floor of the building. The roof door was fastened on the inside. Nevertheless, she opened it and stepped out for a moment on the roof. It was deserted; the white mantle that covered its tin hideousness was unmarked by a single footprint.

"You surely can't be looking for your husband!" incredulously began the hall-boy behind her.

"Oh, no!" hastily disclaimed Mrs. Willoughby, stepping in and refastening the door, with a light, mirthless laugh. "Of course not! Which apartment does that large man with the black mustache live in, Lester," she inquired, as they began the descent of the stairs—"the one who looks like a retired policeman or a detective?"

"I don't believe I know who you mean," the youth told her, his tone puzzled.

Mrs. Willoughby turned at the door of her apartment.

"Think!" she ordered. "Now, do you mean to tell me that you haven't taken a heavily built, thick-mustached man in a brown derby hat and a dark ulster up in your car within the past half-hour—any time at all to-day?"

"I haven't seen such a man; no, ma'am."

"You're—" she faltered—"you're sure?"

"Positive."

Pushing open the door, Mrs. Willoughby withdrew her hand from one of the pockets of her coat and dropped something shining on the young man's palm.

"Thank you, Lester," said she. "And I'll appreciate it if you won't say anything about this to any one until I see you again."

She shut the door. Walking down the hall once more to her husband's room, she pulled off her hat and brushed the damp hair back from her forehead. It was crinkled in perplexity, as she looked in at the man's head on the pillow.

For, although Henry Willoughby was no longer there, the bed held an occupant.



The stranger she had just described to the hall-boy was lying under the covers!

## II.

To find her husband gone—vanished into thin air—was one thing. Of course, there was really nothing supernatural about his disappearance, in spite of the fact that he was certainly no longer in the apartment, and that he had not been seen to leave the building, which made it impossible that he could have done so.

There was some simple explanation of where he had gone that she would be sure to discover when she set her wits to the task. It was nonsense to suppose that he could flicker out like a flame of a candle in a gust of wind, leaving not a trace of his going behind.

But to find this unknown man in his place, apparently materialized by the wave of a magician's wand, since she had the hall-boy's word for it that he did not live in the building, and the fact that Lester had not taken him up in the elevator, left no possible way for him to have reached that apartment on the sixth floor of the house—well, it was slightly different.

This was not the first time Mrs. Willoughby had seen the stranger lying there, with one arm outstretched toward the wall to which his closed eyes were turned; proof enough of the fact that she wasn't dreaming. She did not smile over the ironic thought which crossed her mind, that in his presence she was confronted by a mystery coming and going—her husband's going from the flat and this man's arrival there.

It would not have been surprising if the lady had acknowledged with a scream the fact that her nerves had slipped from her control as a result of the unusualness of the situation with which she was face to face. Doubtless it was what nine women out of ten would have done. Either that, or they would have run to the telephone to call in the police or the neighbors. Mrs. Willoughby shut her teeth with a decisive click, instead. She meant to get to the bottom of this—alone, for the present.

Just as there must be an explanation to account for her husband's vanishing, so one must exist that would remove this man's

occupancy of Henry's bed from the realm of the miraculous and place it in that of the matter-of-fact. She walked briskly into the room and halted at the bedside.

"I beg your pardon!" she addressed the intruder.

Apparently her words fell on deaf ears. She placed her hand on his shoulder and shook him. Even that failed to rouse him from the coma in which he, too, seemed to be lying. He hadn't been drinking. But he might be under the influence of some drug, for all she could tell. And so might Henry. She hadn't thought of that before.

Out of his mind, as a result of the dropping of some nameless powder into his food at lunch time by a personal or business enemy, her husband had wandered away—but that was rubbish, she checked herself. Wandered *where*? Clad only in his nightgown, with the thermometer outside standing at two degrees above zero! The impassable condition of the stairway, and the untracked snow on the roof, which proved that it had not been visited, left the elevator as the only means by which he could have escaped from the building, and he hadn't used that.

She shook the man in bed again—taking both hands to it, this time. The only effect her strenuous efforts to rouse him had upon the heavy stranger was to quicken his thick breathing. She stood contemplating him from under a baffled frown.

From the blue pajama-sleeve on his exposed arm, her eyes traveled to the pile of clothing, topped by a brown derby hat, on the chair beside the other one that held her husband's garments. Perhaps she could at least discover his identity by searching his pockets, since she was unable to learn from his own lips who he was, what he was doing in the apartment, and how he had got there.

A bunch of keys, watch and chain, handkerchief, a filled cigar-case, half-empty match-safe, and a Russian-leather bill-fold—those things Mrs. Willoughby brought to light from the stranger's ulster and blue serge suit. But that was all. She failed to find a card, a letter, or a scrap of paper of any sort by which she could gain a clue as to his name, or where he had come from.

Not even the customary initials were in his hat, and the case of his watch and the gold-trimmed pocketbook were without a monogram.

She opened the wallet, and her eyes widened as they gazed at its contents. Bills of large denominations, twenties, fifties and hundreds—she needed to run the ends of but a third of them under her thumb, to realize that here was more money than she had ever before held all at one time.

Alone in the flat with a strange man and that small fortune in ready cash, and under such utterly incomprehensible circumstances—it was no wonder that Mrs. Willoughby, with the pocketbook clutched tightly in her hands, sat down weakly on the side of the bed.

She rose, the next moment, and began to put back his belongings in the stranger's clothes, methodically restoring each article to the pocket from which she had taken it. The wallet, with its precious contents, she shoved well down in the inner breast pocket of his coat, folding the carelessly discarded ulster and placing it on top of it as a further safeguard. Then she stepped back and unbuttoned her coat, which she had as yet neglected to take off.

There was one thing her discovery of all that money in that unknown man's clothes had proved to her; her husband's disappearance was not the result of foul play of any sort.

Suppose, just for the sake of supposing, that he had been kidnaped for ransom by a mysterious band of miscreants, who possessed the secret of the fourth dimension. Would they have taken him away, and left this person, with several thousand dollars in his possession, behind?

And yet Henry had never left that apartment of his own free will and volition. That was another thing of which his wife was absolutely sure. Even if he had become delirious after she had gone, and started from the house in his nightclothes, his appearance in that unconventional costume at the door of any one of the neighboring apartments—the only place left that he could have vanished to—would have set the building in a turmoil long before this.

And none of the tenants, attracted by his raving, could have come in and taken him out of that flat into theirs, thinking him alone there. They would have seen the note that was still pinned to his pillow, to tell where she had gone and how quickly she intended to return, which would have deterred anybody with a grain of common sense from removing him, at least without leaving a message concerning his whereabouts that would allay her anxiety when she came back.

Then *where* was he? In spite of her unemotional nature, and the effort she was making to keep a grip on herself, Mrs. Willoughby felt an odd chill stealing up her spine to the roots of her hair.

The situation was unbelievable—weirdly so. There was no way she could think of that the man she saw very much alive, if utterly helpless, in her husband's bed could have got there. And no way under the sun, so far as she could see, that Henry could have been spirited away without leaving a single trace behind.

But he hadn't gone out of the house. If it was impossible that he could have left the apartment, he must still be in it. She hadn't half searched the place yet.

He might be lying gagged and trussed up under a bed or in a closet, at that moment. Her imagination painted with lightning strokes, the scene that had followed her going from the flat. She saw this stalwart, dark-mustached man enter it by the fire escape—that was how he had got in there—to drag poor Henry from the bed and fell him with a blow. Then he had tied him up and hidden him away. After which—well, he might be a lunatic, as his unprovoked attack upon her husband proved, and so he had undressed and gone to bed in the other's place and fallen asleep.

Did crazy people slumber so soundly that no amount of talking to them and shaking them could wake them up? And were they in the habit of carrying blue suits of pajamas around with them in which to take advantage of every opportunity that presented itself to them to snatch forty winks?

Mrs. Willoughby pressed her hands to her throbbing temples. The thing was too much for her mind to cope with. Yet she



clung to the only sensible thought it had evolved so far out of the wholly incredible state of affairs—her husband must still be in the apartment. She turned, to begin to search it from end to end.

And then the telephone rang.

With a sigh of relief, she ran to answer it. It would be Dr. Hilton, calling up to let her know he had got the word of her husband's illness which she had left with the maid, and that he was coming right over.

Now that man in Henry's bed would tell what he was doing there. The doctor would know how to bring him to. And when he had explained his presence in the house, she felt sure that the mystery of how her husband had gone from sight in it would be cleared up as well.

But it was not the physician who was telephoning. Mrs. Willoughby almost dropped the receiver from her ear, as she heard the unmistakable deep tones of her husband's voice!

### III.

"HELLO, Maria!"

"Henry—where are you? How—"

"I'm all right. Don't worry about me."

"But you're sick—"

"I was, but I'm not any longer. Feel great!" His voice certainly sounded as though he did. "And now, listen to what I say!"

"I want to know where you are," Mrs. Willoughby interrupted, "and how you got out of this house without—"

"No time for that now," he broke in. "I'll explain later. Listen to me, and do as I tell you. You've got to see Caroline."

Mrs. Willoughby's lips formed the word soundlessly before she could repeat it:

"Caroline?"

"Yes. You haven't seen her yet, have you?"

"Who—what on earth are you talking about, Henry? I don't know anybody by that name."

"I know it. But you're going to, in just a few moments more," her husband cryptically informed her. "She's in the closet. I want you to try to get those letters away from her—"

"The closet!" Mrs. Willoughby cried. "What closet? *What* does all this mean—"

"The closet in your bedroom. You've got to get the letters away from her, if you can. It's important—"

That was all Mrs. Willoughby heard, for a moment. She had lowered the receiver in her right hand and transferred it to her left. Perhaps there was something the matter with the ear with which she had been listening. She would try the other one. But when she applied the receiver to it, she heard nothing—only the faint humming of the wire which proved that it was no longer in use.

"Hello—hello, central!"

She rattled the hook desperately. They had been disconnected, or her husband had rung off. And she was still ignorant of his whereabouts, of how he had got outside of the apartment house—

"Number, please?" requested the uninterested voice of central.

"Put my husband—the person I was just speaking with, back on the wire!" breathlessly ordered Mrs. Willoughby. "He may get tired of trying to call me back, and ring off—"

"The party *has* rung off," central informed her.

Mrs. Willoughby groaned.

"Then find out where the call came from," she pleaded—"hurry, central, please!"

There was a minute's pause.

"The party rang you up from a coin-box phone in a corner cigar store," the operator reported. "That's all the information I can give you—I'm breaking the rules by telling you even that much."

Mrs. Willoughby thanked the girl, and hung up.

She rubbed her forehead dazedly once more. Before her she had a mental picture of her husband, clad in the old-fashioned nightgown that was his sole article of attire, entering a cigar store and dropping a nickel into the slot of a public phone to call her up!

If anything had been needed to deepen the mystery with which she had to deal, surely this was it. She walked aimlessly into the living-room.

The fire escape outside the window met her idle gaze. She crossed the room and regarded the iron structure through the frosted pane. The snow that covered it was as undisturbed as that on the roof; which proved it was *not* how the strange man in her husband's bed had entered the apartment. That end of the two-sided riddle remained unsolved as before, therefore.

What Henry had said to her over the phone about the closet in her bedroom flashed back into her mind. Some woman with whom she was unacquainted—although her husband knew her well enough to call her by her first name—was in there. Was he crazy, or had she gone out of her mind? If she should find that the apartment was occupied by another stranger besides that man in her husband's room—well, she would begin to believe that she *had* lost her reason, indeed.

Turning, she went out into the hall of the flat and walked slowly along it to her room. Entering it, with the same halting steps, she stopped in front of the double doors of the closet beside her dressing-table. What would she discover when she opened it? Obviously, the only way to find out was to throw the doors wide and see. Drawing in a deep breath, she did so.

She expelled her breath, in an amazed gasp, the next moment. Confronting her was a fashionably attired and beautiful young woman. She stepped out, with a smile, and loosened the rich fur stole that was draped around her shoulders.

"It was warm in there," she remarked calmly—"quite stuffy, as a matter of fact."

By a supreme effort, Mrs. Willoughby recovered herself.

"Perhaps," she suggested, in a tone that very creditably imitated the calmness of the other woman's—"perhaps you'll find the living-room more comfortable. The room at the end of the hall," she explained, as the other turned, with a pleasant nod of assent, toward the door, "where you can sit down while you tell me what you are doing here, how you got into my apartment, and several other things that I should like to ask you."

"Of course, I'll tell you as much or as little as I feel like," her newest guest—or

the one whose presence in the house she had most recently become aware of—informed her sweetly, as she seated herself in the armchair beside the center table in the living-room to which Mrs. Willoughby had followed her. "Now, what would you like to know first?"

"Who you are." Mrs. Willoughby grimly sat down before her.

The girl—she was not more than twenty, Mrs. Willoughby decided, and prettier than she had first thought—laughed with unaffected amusement.

"Why, I'm—I'm Caroline!" she announced. "I heard your husband telling you about me over the phone only a minute or two ago."

Mrs. Willoughby nodded unsmilingly.

"Caroline what?"

"Just Caroline, for the present, will do."

"And how did you get in here?"

"That's one of the things I mustn't tell you. At least, not now."

"Do you know that we are not alone?" Mrs. Willoughby leaned forward to inquire. "That there is a strange man in my husband's room?"

"He may be a stranger to you," observed the girl, with twinkling eyes, "but he's not to me!"

"You know him, then? Tell me how he got into this apartment—"

"I'm sorry, but I can't. I don't mean that I don't know how he did it. For I do—that part of it is really very simple."

Mrs. Willoughby cleared her throat.

"Er—would you object to telling me how long you have known my husband?"

"Not very long." The girl dropped her eyes. "But long enough for us both to learn that we are very dear to each other."

Could she believe her ears? Mrs. Willoughby asked herself. Henry, her model husband, had been leading a double life, according to this young woman's reply. What else could it mean? And yet she could not believe that anything so awful, so entirely out of keeping with his staid character, would really be so. Not without further proof of it, at least.

"There were some letters my husband spoke of you having," she began.

The girl nodded. She drew a package



from her muff and held it up. Even at that distance, Mrs. Willoughby had no difficulty in recognizing her husband's handwriting on the first envelope of the quite sizable bundle. She put out her hand.

"He wanted me to take them from you—"

"Give his letters to you, his wife?" the other cried, hastily putting them back in her muff, and rising. "No, no! You sha'n't have them, and he should not have asked—"

"Stop!" Mrs. Willoughby had also risen. "This has gone far enough now. You are going to tell me the truth—all of it. Just what you are to my husband, and what he is to you; how you got into that closet, and who that man in his room is and how he got in—"

The girl interrupted with a laugh—a coldly mocking one, this time.

"You are going to force me to do all that, I suppose?" she suggested.

"I am," Mrs. Willoughby replied, taking a determined step toward her.

"Just one moment, please!" the girl checked her. She regarded Mrs. Willoughby with a contemptuously pitying smile. "Before you go any further, I advise you to see what's in the kitchen."

Involuntarily, Mrs. Willoughby cast a startled look behind her. Was it possible that the house, from which she had been absent for only a trifle more than ten minutes all day long, held still further startling revelations for her?

"I imagine what you'll find there will surprise you," the girl told her, with a knowing nod, as Mrs. Willoughby uncertainly regarded her.

She had already been in the kitchen and discovered nothing unusual there, the older woman reflected. But she had been in her bedroom, too, without suspecting the other's presence there. Perhaps, concealed in the china cupboard, under the sink, or in the washtubs, she might find—what?

Turning, she went out of the room and down the hall to the other end of the flat. The kitchen, as she viewed it from the doorway, looked quite natural. Stepping into it, she gazed around the walls and up at the ceiling. Then she stooped and looked

under the table and the sink. Lifting the top of the laundry tubs, she looked into them. There was nobody there. The cupboard likewise held nothing but the dishes in their customary places on the shelves. Acting on a sudden thought, she tiptoed to the door and listened.

Not a sound reached her ears in the flat. She went back to the living-room, looking into all the other rooms on both sides of the hall as she did so. Her feminine visitor had gone.

Her suggestion that she examine the kitchen had just been a ruse, then, to permit her to escape from the apartment. Mrs. Willoughby walked back to her husband's room.

The man in his bed hadn't moved. She shut her lips determinedly, as she regarded him. Before she did another thing, she would make that thorough search of the flat which she had been prevented from carrying out by her husband's inexplicable telephoning to her. Perhaps she would uncover something in some one of the rooms that she had not as yet minutely explored, that would solve the mystery of how this stranger had got into the house.

She went back to the kitchen and entered the maid's room adjoining it. Opening the closet there, she had satisfied herself that no one was concealed in it—when again she paused to listen. Had she only imagined that she heard somebody moving about in the living-room?

She started up the hall to it. As she did so, she thought she saw a flash of something blue at the half-open door of her husband's bedroom. There was nobody in the living-room; it seemed to be just as she had left it. She went to the door of Henry's room and looked at the man in the bed. He was lying there in exactly the same position.

Mrs. Willoughby glanced into the small reception room. And she stiffened, her eyes fixed on one point. When she had replaced the receiver on the hook of the telephone at the conclusion of the brief conversation she had held over it with her husband, she had not hung it upside down.

And that was the position it was now in. She stepped to the door of her husband's

room, noiselessly withdrew the key from the inner side of it, and closed and locked it.

Despite the fact that he seemed to be lying in exactly the same attitude in the bed as when she had last looked at him, that man must have risen and used the telephone while she had been at the other end of the flat. Whatever he was up to, she had cornered him now. He couldn't get out of that room until she had telephoned for the police. She hastened toward the phone.

And then she stopped. Somebody was at the front door of the apartment. For the second time that afternoon, she heard the familiar grating of her husband's key in the lock. The next moment he had swung the door wide to hail her, with a jubilant grin:

"Congratulations, old girl—you win!"

#### IV.

It was not the strangeness of his greeting which held Mrs. Willoughby spellbound. Her wide eyes took in the fact that Henry was not attired only in his nightgown. He was wearing an overcoat and a suit of clothes that she had never seen before. She drew back, as he attempted to seize her in his arms with an unwonted display of affection.

"Perhaps," she said coldly, "you'll tell me where you've been now, and what all of this means—"

"I will!" he promised, with the same breathless exuberance. "Come in and sit down, and I'll explain every thing to you. But I'd like to hug you, just once, to show you what a brick I think you are—"

"You'd better explain, first," Mrs. Willoughby dryly told him—"that is, if you can."

"Why, that's the easiest thing in the world!"

"Is it?" Her tone was sarcastically interested. "You can tell me how you were able to leave this house in nothing but your nightclothes, and return to it fully dressed—"

"I only stepped into the apartment next door," he interrupted, with a smile, "where I had this complete ready-made outfit stored away. The Jacksons, who live

there, have gone to Atlantic City for the week-end. Lester let me in with the pass-key that he borrowed from the janitor—"

"But he told me he hadn't seen you!" Mrs. Willoughby incredulously broke in.

"He told you what wasn't so, my dear," her husband smilingly informed her. "I paid him to do it. Just as I did the girl at the switchboard, to disguise her voice and pretend to be central when you tried to call up Dr. Hilton, and again when you wanted to find out where I had called you up from."

"Then he *had* taken that man I found lying in your bed up in the elevator?"

"Sure thing. He came in with me, and waited in the next flat until you'd gone. I let him know the coast was clear, then, and he popped in here. Do you see?"

Mrs. Willoughby sat narrowly regarding her husband.

"And you weren't sick at all when you first came home?"

"Not a bit. Simply acting the part."

She shook her head helplessly.

"What I *don't* see," she announced, "is what you did it all for. Making me think you'd disappeared as if by magic, and that another man had taken your place in bed in the same way; and that girl in the closet in my bedroom, too—"

"You'll understand that," her husband put in, "and all the rest of it, a great deal quicker by letting me talk. To begin with, a man I didn't suppose I'd ever seen before called on me at the office this morning. He was the man you found in my bed. By the way, where is he now?"

"Locked in your room," grimly answered his wife.

Henry leaned back in his chair and laughed. Wiping his eyes, he regarded her with a wondering shake of his head.

"You're great!" said he. "But I haven't just discovered that fact—not by a long shot!"

"Go on," Mrs. Willoughby requested.

"Well, there's no use of my asking you to guess who he turned out to be, because you'd never be able to, any more than I could at first. You've heard of Tolliver Gunn, the famous private detective, haven't you? That's who he was. Only, as it



happens, that isn't his real name. He's my Uncle Horace, on my father's side. He had his daughter with him—"

"Whose name, as it happens, is Caroline?" she quickly interjected.

"My cousin," he assented, with a nod. "Well, Uncle Horace coolly informed me that he had hunted me up for the purpose of turning over to me one third of the fortune he had accumulated at the end of twenty years of successfully tracking down big criminals, getting evidence in divorce cases among the rich swells, and so on. He's retired, with more money than he and his daughter could possibly spend; and as I was the only other living relative he had, he'd decided to make me rich while he was alive and could have the fun of watching me enjoy the money.

"Then I told him I was married, and the deal was all off. He had little or no use for women, he told me. They flew into a panic at the least little thing out of the ordinary that happened around them. That was his main grievance against the sex. His daughter was different. *She* would be cool as a cucumber even while the kindlings were being lighted at her feet to burn her at the stake, I learned from him. *She* was one woman in a million.

"Well, so were you, I told him. Nothing that had happened in the fourteen years we'd been married had thrown you into a duck fit. Calmness under extraordinary circumstances was your middle name. Was I willing to put you to the test? he asked me. And I said I was.

"So he figured this thing out. First, I'd come home as if I was sicker than you'd ever seen me before. If that didn't make you lose your head, you'd drop in a swoon when you got back from the doctor's to find me gone, with my clothes right where

I had left them, and no apparent way that I could possibly have got out of the house. To give your nerves an added jolt, there'd be a strange man in my place. If you didn't begin to shriek and run around in dizzy circles after that, you surely would when you found a woman in the flat with a bunch of letters in my handwriting in her possession, which would indicate that she was your rival. Or else you would have demonstrated the fact that you were what I claimed you were—another woman in a million. In which case, we'd get the money.

"By playing the part of the strange man in my bed, Uncle Horace would be right where he could watch you every minute and see how you took things. I told him he could give me a ring in the flat next door, when he was satisfied that I knew you better than he thought he did. He called me up less than five minutes ago—"

"But why didn't you tell me what you wanted me to do, as soon as you came home?" exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby, who had risen from her chair with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. "It wasn't necessary to keep me in the dark all this while, when I could have acted the part—"

"But you wouldn't have fooled Uncle Horace—a detective with all his years of experience," her husband pointed out. "I had to let you go through with the thing, just as I did. I knew all along that when I was betting on you, I was backing a sure thing—just as you've proved."

"How much," asked his wife, "is he going to give us?"

He told her.

"Gracious!" gasped Mrs. Willoughby, opening her eyes in her husband's arms a moment later. "It's a lucky thing I locked him in that room, or we'd have lost the money just now—if he'd seen me faint!"

LIKE A WHIRLWIND!

## "BEAU RAND"

BY CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Square Deal Sanderson," etc.

IS COMING NEARER AND NEARER!

# The Duke of Chimney Butte\*

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Listener," etc.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE SENTINEL.

THERE appeared in the light of the hotel door for a moment the figures of struggling men, followed by the sound of feet in flight down the steps, and somebody mounting a horse in haste at the hotel hitching-rack. Whoever this was rode away at a hard gallop.

Lambert knew that the battle was over, and as he came to the hitching-rack he saw that Taterleg's horse was still there. So he had not fled. Several voices sounded from the porch in excited talk, among them Taterleg's, proving that he was uninjured.

His uneasiness gone, Lambert stood a little while in front, well out in the dark, trying to pick up what was being said, but with little result, for people were arriving with noise of heavy boots to learn the cause of the disturbance.

Taterleg held the floor for a little while, his voice severe as if he laid down the law. Alta replied in what appeared to be indignant protest, then fell to crying. There was a picture of her in the door a moment being led inside by her mother, blubbering into her hands. The door slammed after them, and Taterleg was heard to say in a loud, firm voice:

"Don't approach me, I tell you! I'd hit a blind woman as quick as I would a one-armed man!"

Lambert felt that this was the place to interfere. He called Taterleg.

"All right, duke; I'm a comin'," Taterleg answered.

The door opened, revealing the one-armed proprietor entering the house; revealing a group of men and women, bare-headed, as they had rushed to the hotel at the sound of the shooting; revealing Taterleg coming down the steps, his box of chewing gum under his arm.

Wood fastened the door back in its accustomed anchorage. His neighbors closed round where he stood explaining the affair, his stump of arm lifting and wagging, and pointing in the expressionless gestures common to a man thus maimed.

"Are you hurt?" Lambert inquired.

"No, I ain't hurt none, duke."

Taterleg got aboard of his horse with nothing more asked of him or volunteered on his part. They had not proceeded far when his indignation broke bounds.

"I ain't hurt, but I'm swung like a fool miller moth in a lamp chimley," he complained.

"Who was that shootin' around so darned careless?"

"Jedlick, dern him!"

"It's a wonder he didn't kill somebody up-stairs somewhere."

"First shot he hit a box of t'backer back of Wood's counter. I don't know what he hit the second time, but it wasn't me."

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"He hit the side of the store."

Taterleg rode along in silence a little way. "Well, that was purty good for him," he said.

"Who was that hopped a horse like he was goin' for the doctor, and tore off?"

"Jedlick, dern him!"

Lambert allowed the matter to rest at that, knowing that neither of them had been hurt. Taterleg would come to the telling of it before long, not being built so that he could hold a piece of news like that without suffering great discomfort.

"I'm through with that bunch down there," he said in the tone of deep, disgusting renunciation. "I never was led on and soaked that way before in my life. No, I ain't hurt, duke, but it ain't no fault of that girl I ain't. She done all she could to kill me off."

"Who started it?"

"Well, I'll give it to you-straight, duke, from the first word, and you can judge for yourself what kind of a woman that girl's goin' to turn out to be. I never would 'a' believed she'd 'a' throwed a man that way, but you can't read 'em, duke; no man can read 'em."

"I guess that's right," Lambert allowed, wondering how far he had read in certain dark eyes which seemed as innocent as a child's.

"It's past the power of any man to do it. Well, you know, I went over there with my fresh box of gum, all of the fruit flavors you can name, and me and her we set out on the porch gabbin' and samplin' that gum. She never was so leanin' and lovin' before, settin' up so clost to me you couldn't 'a' put a sheet of writin' paper between us. Shucks!"

"Rubbin' the paint off, Taterleg. You ought 'a' took the tip that she was about done with you."

"You're right; I would 'a' if I'd 'a' had as much brains as a ant. Well, she told me Jedlick was layin' for me, and begged me not to hurt him, for she didn't want to see me go to jail on account of a feller like him. She talked to me like a Dutch uncle, and put her head so clost I could feel them bangs a ticklin' my ear. But that's done with; she can tickle all the ears she wants

to tickle, but she'll never tickle mine no more. And all the time she was talkin' to me like that, where do you reckon that Jedlick feller was at?"

"In the saloon, I guess, firin' up."

"No, he wasn't, duke. He was settin' right in that *ho*-tel, with his old flat feet under the table, shovelin' in pie. He come out pickin' his teeth purty soon, standin' there by the door, dern him, like he owned the dump. Well, he may, for all I know. Alta, she inched away from me, and she says to him: 'Mr. Jedlick, come over here and shake hands with Mr. Wilson.'

"Yes," he says, 'I'll shake insect powder on his gravel!'

"I see you doin' it," I says, 'you long-hungry and half-full! If you ever make a pass at me you'll swaller wind so fast you'll bust.' Well, he begun to shuffle and prance and cut up like a boy makin' faces, and there's where Alta she ducked in through the parlor winder. 'Don't hurt him, Mr. Jedlick,' she says; 'please don't hurt him!'

"I'll chaw him up as fine as cat hair and blow him out through my teeth," Jedlick told her. And there's where I started after that feller. He was standin' in front of the door all the time, where he could duck inside if he saw me comin', and I guess he would 'a' ducked if Wood hadn't 'a' been there. When he saw Wood, old Jedlick pulled his gun.

"I slung down on him time enough to blow him in two, and pulled on my trigger, not aimin' to hurt the old sooner, only to snap a bullet between his toes, but she wouldn't work. Old Jedlick, he was so rattled at the sight of that gun in my hand he banged loose, slap through the winder into that box of plug back of the counter. I pulled on her and pulled on her, but she wouldn't snap, and I was yankin' at the hammer to cock her when he tore loose with that second shot. That's when I found out what was the matter with my gun."

Taterleg was so moved at this passage that he seemed to run out of words. He rode along in silence until they reached the top of the hill, and the house on the mesa stood before them, dark and lonesome. Then he pulled out his gun and handed it across to the duke.

"Run your thumb over the hammer of that gun, duke," he said.

"Well! What in the world—it feels like chewin' gum, Taterleg."

"It is chewin' gum, duke. A wad of it as big as my fist gluin' down the hammer of that gun. That girl put it on there, duke. She knew Jedlick wouldn't have no more show before me, man to man, than a rabbit. She done me that trick, duke; she wanted to kill me off."

"There wasn't no joke about that, old feller," the duke said seriously, grateful that the girl's trick had not resulted in any greater damage to his friend than the shock to his dignity and simple heart.

"Yes, and it was my own gum. That's the worst part of it, duke; she wasn't even usin' his gum, dang her melts!"

"She must have favored Jedlick pretty strong to go that far."

"Well, if she wants him after what she's saw of him, she can take him. I clinched him before he could waste any more ammunition, and twisted his gun away from him. I jolted him a couple of jolts with my fist, and he broke and run. You seen him hop his horse."

"What did you do with his gun?"

"I walked over to the winder where that girl was lookin' out to see Jedlick wipe up the porch with me, and I handed her the gun, and I says: 'Give this to Mr. Jedlick with my regards,' I says, 'and tell him if he wants any more to send me word.' Well, she come out, and I called her on what she done to my gun. She swore she didn't mean it for nothing but a joke. I said if that was her idear of a joke, the quicker we parted the sooner. She begun to bawl, and the old man and old woman put in, and I'd 'a' slapped that feller, duke, if he'd 'a' had two arms on him. But you can't slap a half of a man."

"I guess that's right."

"I walked up to that girl, and I said: 'You've chawed the last wad of my gum you'll ever plaster up ag'in' your old lean jawbone. You may be some figger in Gledora,' I says, 'but anywheres else you wouldn't cut no more ice than a cracker.' Wood, he took it up agin. That's when I come away."

"It looks like it's all off between you and Alta now."

"Broke off, short up to the handle. Serves a feller right for bein' a fool. I might 'a' knowed when she wanted me to shave my mustache off she didn't have no more heart in her than a fish."

"That was askin' a lot of a man, sure as the world."

"No man can look two ways at once without somebody puttin' something down his back, duke."

"Referrin' to the lady in Wyoming. Sure."

"She was white. She says: 'Mr. Wil-son, I'll always think of you as a gentleman.' Them was her last words, duke."

They were walking their horses past the house, which was dark, careful not to wake Vesta. But their care went for nothing; she was not in bed. Around the turn of the long porch they saw her standing in the moonlight, looking across the river into the lonely night. It seemed as if she stood in communion with distant places, to which she sent her longing out of a bondage that she could not flee.

"She looks lonesome," Taterleg said. "Well, I ain't a goin' to go and pet and console her. I'm done takin' chances."

Lambert understood as never before how melancholy that life must be for her. She turned as they passed, her face clear in the bright moonlight. Taterleg swept off his hat with the grand air that took him so far with the ladies, Lambert saluting with less extravagance.

Vesta waved her hand in acknowledgment, turning again to her watching over the vast, empty land, as if she waited the coming of somebody who would quicken her life with the cheer that it wanted so sadly that calm summer night.

Lambert felt an unusual restlessness that night—no mood over him for his bed. It seemed, in truth, that a man would be wasting valuable hours of life by locking his senses up in sleep. He put his horse away, sated with the comedy of Taterleg's adventure, and not caring to pursue it farther. To get away from the discussion of it that he knew Taterleg would keep going as long as there was an ear open to hear



him, he walked to the near-by hilltop to view the land under this translating spell.

This was the hilltop from which he had ridden down to interfere between Vesta and Nick Hargus. With that adventure he had opened his account of trouble in the Bad Lands, an account that was growing day by day, the final balancing of which he could not foresee.

From where he stood, the house was dark and lonely as an abandoned habitation. It seemed, indeed, that bright and full of youthful light as Vesta Philbrook was, she was only one warm candle in the gloom of this great and melancholy monument of her father's misspent hopes. Before she could warm it into life and cheerfulness, it would encroach upon her with its chilling gloom, like an insidious cold drift of sand, smothering her beauty, burying her quick heart away from the world for which it longed, for evermore.

It would need the noise of little feet across those broad, empty, lonesome porches to wake the old house; the shouting and laughter and gleam of merry eyes that childhood brings into this world's gloom, to drive away the shadows that draped it like a mist. Perhaps Vesta stood there to-night sending her soul out in a call to some one for whom she longed, these hopes in her own good heart.

He sighed, wishing her well of such hope if she had it, and forgot her in a moment as his eyes picked up a light far across the hills. Now it twinkled brightly, now it wavered and died, as if its beam was all too weak to hold to the continued effort of projecting itself so far. That must be the Kerr ranch; no other habitation lay in that direction. Perhaps in the light of that lamp somebody was sitting, bending a dark head in pensive tenderness with a thought of him.

He stood with his pleasant fancy, his dream around him like a cloak. All the trouble that was in the world for him that hour was near the earth, like the precipitation of settling waters. Over it he gazed, superior to its ugly murk, careless of whether it might rise to befoul the clear current of his hopes, or sink and settle to obscure his dreams no more.

There was a sound of falling shale on

the slope, following the disturbance of a quick foot. Vesta was coming. Unseen and unheard through the insulation of his thoughts, she had approached within ten rods of him before he saw her, the moonlight on her fair face, glorious in her uncovered hair.

## CHAPTER XX.

### BUSINESS, AND MORE.

"YOU stand out like an Indian water monument up here," she said reprovingly, as she came scrambling up, taking the hand that he hastened forward to offer and boost her over the crumbling shale.

"I expect Hargus could pick me off from below there anywhere, but I didn't think of that," he said.

"It wouldn't be above him," seriously, discounting the light way in which he spoke of it; "he's done things just as cowardly, and so have others you've met."

"I haven't got much opinion of the valor of men who hunt in packs, Vesta. Some of them might be skulking around, glad to take a shot at us. Don't you think we'd better go down?"

"We can sit over there and be off the sky-line. It's always the safe thing to do around here."

She indicated a point where an inequality in the hill would be above their heads sitting, and there they composed themselves—the moonlit world before them, the sheltering swell of grassy hilltop at their backs.

"It's not a very complimentary reflection on a civilized community that one has to take such a precaution, but it's necessary, duke."

"It's enough to make you want to leave it, Vesta. It's bad enough to have to dodge danger in a city, but out here, with all this lonesomeness around you, it's worse."

"Do you feel it lonesome here?" She asked it with a curious soft slowness, a speculative detachment, as if she only half thought of what she said.

"I'm never lonesome where I can see the sun rise and set. There's a lot of company in cattle, more than in any amount of people you don't know."

"I find it the same way, duke. I never was so lonesome as when I was away from here at school."

"Everybody feels that way about home, I guess. But I thought maybe you'd like it better away among people like yourself."

"No. If it wasn't for this endless watching, I wouldn't change this for any place in the world. On nights like this, when it whispers in a thousand inaudible voices, and beckons and holds one close, I feel that I never can go away. There's a call in it that is so subtle and tender, so full of sympathy, that I answer it with tears."

"I wish things could be cleared up so you could live here in peace and enjoy it, but I don't know how it's going to come out. It looks to me like I've made it worse."

"It was wrong of me to draw you into it, duke; I should have let you go your way."

"There's no regrets on my side, Vesta. I guess it was planned for me to come this far and stop."

"They'll never rest till they've drawn you into a quarrel that will give them an excuse for killing you, duke. They're doubly sure to do it since you got away from them that night. I shouldn't have stopped you; I should have let you go on that day."

"I had to stop somewhere, Vesta," he laughed. "Anyway, I've found here what I started out to find. This was the end of my road."

"What you started to find, duke?"

"A man-sized job, I guess." He laughed again, but with a colorless artificiality, sweating over the habit of solitude that leads a man into thinking aloud.

"You've found it, all right, duke, and you're filling it. That's some satisfaction to you, I know. But it's a man-using job, a life-wasting job," she said sadly.

"I've only got myself to blame for anything that's happened to me here, Vesta. It's not the fault of the job."

"Well, if you'll stay with me till I sell the cattle, duke, I'll think of you as the next best friend I ever had."

"I've got no intention of leaving you, Vesta."

"Thank you, duke."

Lambert sat turning over in his mind something that he wanted to say to her, but which he could not yet shape to his tongue. She was looking in the direction of the light that he had been watching, a gleam of which showed faintly now and then, as if between moving boughs.

"I don't like the notion of your leaving this country whipped, Vesta," he said, coming to it at last.

"I don't like to leave it whipped, duke."

"But that's the way they'll look at it if you go."

Silence again, both watching the far-distant, twinkling light.

"I laid out the job for myself of bringing these outlaws around here up to your fence with their hats in their hands, and I hate to give it up before I've made good on my word."

"Let it go, duke; it isn't worth the fight."

"A man's word is either good for all he intends it to be, or worth no more than the lowest scoundrel's, Vesta. If I don't put up works to equal what I've promised, I'll have to sneak out of this country between two suns."

"I threw off too much on the shoulders of a willing and gallant stranger," she sighed. "Let it go, duke; I've made up my mind to sell out and leave."

He made no immediate return to this declaration, but after a while he said:

"This will be a mighty bleak spot with the house abandoned and dark on winter nights and no stock around the barns."

"Yes, duke."

"There's no place so lonesome as one where somebody's lived, and put his hopes and ambitions into it, and gone away and left it empty. I can hear the winter wind cuttin' around the house down yonder, mournin' like a widow woman in the night."

A sob broke from her, a sudden, sharp, struggling expression of her sorrow for the desolation that he pictured in his simple words. She bent her head into her hands and cried. Lambert was sorry for the pain that he had unwittingly stirred in her breast, but glad in a glowing tenderness to see that she had this human strain so near



the surface that it could be touched by a sentiment so common, and yet so precious, as the love of home. He laid his hand on her head, stroking her soft, wavy hair.

"Never mind, Vesta," he petted, as if comforting a child. "Maybe we can fix things up here so there'll be somebody to take care of it. Never mind—don't you grieve and cry."

"It's home—the only home I ever knew. There's no place in the world that can be to me what it has been, and is."

"That's so, that's so. I remember, I know. The wind don't blow as soft, the sun don't shine as bright, anywhere else as it does at home. It's been a good while since I had one, and it wasn't much to see, but I've got the recollection of it by me always—I can see every log in the walls."

He felt her shiver with the sobs she struggled to repress as his hand rested on her hair. His heart went out to her in a surge of tenderness when he thought of all she had staked in that land—her youth and the promise of life—of all she had seen planned in hope, built in expectation, and all that lay buried now on the bleak mesa marked by two white stones.

And he caressed her with gentle hand, looking away the while at the spark of light that came and went, came and went, as if through blowing leaves. So it flashed and fell, flashed and fell, like a slow, slow pulse, and died out, as a spark in tinder dies, leaving the far night blank.

Vesta sat up, pushed her hair back from her forehead, her white hand lingering there. He touched it, pressed it comfortingly.

"But I'll have to go," she said, calm in voice, "to end this trouble and strife."

"I've been wondering, since I'm kind of pledged to clean things up here, whether you'd consider a business proposal from me in regard to taking charge of the ranch for you while you're gone, Vesta."

She looked up with a quick start of eagerness.

"You mean I oughtn't sell the cattle, duke?"

"Yes, I think you ought to clean them out. The bulk of them are in as high condition as they'll ever be, and the market's

better right now than it's been in many years."

"Well, what sort of a proposal were you going to make, duke?"

"Sheep."

"Father used to consider turning around to sheep. The country would come to it, he said."

"Coming to it more and more every day. The sheep business is the big future thing in here. Inside of five years everybody will be in the sheep business, and that will mean the end of these rustler camps that go under the name of cattle ranches."

"I'm willing to consider sheep, duke. Go ahead with the plan."

"There's twice the money in them, and not half the expense. One man can take care of two or three thousand, and you can get sheep-herders any day. There can't be any possible objection to them inside your own fence, and you've got range for ten or fifteen thousand. I'd suggest about a thousand to begin with, though."

"I'd do it in a minute, duke—I'll do it whenever you say the word. Then I could leave Ananias and Myrtle here, and I could come back for a little while, maybe."

She spoke with such eagerness, such appeal of loneliness, that he knew it would break her heart ever to go at all. So there on the hilltop they planned and agreed on the change from cattle to sheep, Lambert to have half the increase, according to the custom, with herder's wages for two years. She would have been more generous in the matter of pay, but that was the basis upon which he had made his plans, and he would admit no change.

Vesta was as enthusiastic over it as a child, all eagerness to begin, seeing in the change a promise of the peace for which she had so ardently longed. She appeared to have come suddenly from under a cloud of oppression and to sparkle in the sun of this new hope. It was only when they came to parting at the porch that the ghost of her old trouble came to take its place at her side again.

"Has she cut the fence lately over there, duke?" she asked.

"Not since I caught her at it. I don't think she'll do it again."

"Did she promise you she wouldn't cut it, duke?"

She did not look at him as she spoke, but stood with her face averted, as if she would avoid prying into his secret too directly. Her voice was low, a note of weary sadness in it that seemed a confession of the uselessness of turning her back upon the strife that she would forget.

"No, she didn't promise."

"If she doesn't cut the fence she'll plan to hurt me in some other way. It isn't in her to be honest; she couldn't be honest if she tried."

"I don't like to condemn anybody without a trial, Vesta. Maybe she's changed."

"You can't change a rattlesnake. You seem to forget that she's a Kerr."

"Even at that, she might be different from the rest."

"She never has been. You've had a taste of the Kerr methods, but you're not satisfied yet that they're absolutely base and dishonorable in every thought and deed. You'll find it out to your cost, duke, if you let that girl lead you. She's a will-o'-the-wisp sent to lure you from the trail."

Lambert laughed a bit foolishly, as a man does when the intuition of a woman uncovers the thing that he prided himself was so skilfully concealed that mortal eyes could not find it. Vesta was reading through him like a piece of greased parchment before a lamp.

"I guess it will all come out right," he said weakly.

"You'll meet Kerr one of these days with your old score between you, and he'll kill you or you'll kill him. She knows it as well as I do. Do you suppose she can be sincere with you and keep this thing covered up in her heart? You seem to have forgotten what she and all of them remembers and plots on every minute of her life."

"I don't think she knows anything about what happened to me that night, Vesta."

"She knows all about it," said Vesta, coldly.

"I don't know her very well, of course; I've only passed a few words with her," he excused.

"And a few notes hung on the fence!" she said, not able to hide her scorn. "She's gone away laughing at you every time."

"I thought maybe peace and quiet could be established through her if she could be made to see things in a civilized way."

Vesta made no rejoinder at once. She put her foot on the step as if to leave him, withdrew it, faced him gravely.

"It's nothing to me, duke, only I don't want to see her lead you into another fire. Keep your eyes open and your hand close to your gun when you're visiting with her."

She left him with that advice, given so gravely and honestly that it amounted to more than a warning. He felt that there was something more for him to say to make his position clear, but could not marshal his words. Vesta entered the house without looking back to where he stood, hat in hand, the moonlight in his fair hair.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A TEST OF LOYALTY.

LAMBERT rode to his rendezvous with Grace Kerr on the appointed day, believing that she would keep it, although her promise had been inconclusive. She had only "expected" she would be there, but he more than expected she would come.

He was in a pleasant mood that morning, sentimentally softened to such extent that he believed he might even call accounts off with Sim Hargus and the rest of them if Grace could arrange a peace. Vesta was a little rough on her, he believed. Grace was showing a spirit that seemed to prove she wanted only gentle guiding to abandon the practises of violence to which she had been bred.

Certainly, compared to Vesta, she seemed of coarser ware, even though she was as handsome as heart could desire. This he admitted without prejudice, not being yet wholly blind. But there was no bond of romance between Vesta and him. There was no place for romance between a man and his boss. Romance bound him to Grace Kerr; sentiment enchained him. It was a sweet enslavement, and one to be prolonged in his desire.



Grace was not in sight when he reached their meeting-place. He let down the wire and rode to meet her, troubled as before by that feeling of disloyalty to the Philbrook interests which caused him to stop more than once and debate whether he should turn back and wait inside the fence.

The desire to hasten the meeting with Grace was stronger than this question of his loyalty. He went on, over the hill from which she used to spy on his passing, into the valley where he had interfered between the two girls on the day that he found Grace hidden away in this unexpected place. There he met her coming down the farther slope.

Grace was quite a different figure that day from any she had presented before, wearing a perky little highland bonnet with an eagle feather in it, and a skirt and blouse of the same plaid. His eyes announced his approval as they met, leaning to shake hands from the saddle.

Immediately he brought himself to task for his late admission that she was inferior in the eyes to Vesta. That misapprehension was due to the disadvantage under which he had seen Grace heretofore. This morning she was as dainty as a fresh-blown pink, and as delicately sweet. He swung from the saddle and stood off admiring her with so much speaking from his eyes that she grew rosy in their fire.

"Will you get down, Grace? I've never had a chance to see how tall you are."

The eagle feather came even with his ear when she stood beside him, slender and strong, health in her eyes, her womanhood ripening in her lips. Not as tall as Vesta, not as full of figure, he began in mental measurement, burning with self-reproof when he caught himself at it. Why should he always be drawing comparisons between her and Vesta, to her disadvantage in all things? It was unwarranted, it was absurd!

They sat on the hillside, their horses nipping each other in introductory preliminaries, then settling down to immediate friendship. They were far beyond sight of the fence. Lambert hoped, with an uneasy return of that feeling of disloyalty and guilt, that Vesta would not come riding up that way and find the open strands of wire.

This thought passed away and troubled him no more as they sat talking of the strange way of their "meeting on the run," as she said.

"There isn't a horse in a thousand that could have caught up with me that day."

"Not one in thousands," he amended, with due gratitude to Whetstone.

"I expected you'd be riding him to-day, duke."

"He backed into a fire," said he uneasily, "and burned off most of his tail. He's no sight for a lady in his present shape."

She laughed, looking at him shrewdly, as if she believed it to be a joke to cover something that he didn't want her to know.

"But you promised to give him to me, duke, when he rested up a little."

"I will," he declared earnestly, getting hold of her hand where it lay in the grass between them. "I'll give you anything I've got, Grace, from the breath in my body to the blood in my heart!"

She bent her head, her face rosy with her mounting blood.

"Would you, duke?" said she, so softly that it was not much more than the flutter of the wings of words.

He leaned a little nearer, his heart climbing, as if it meant to smother him and cut him short in that crowning moment of his dream.

"I'd have gone to the end of the world to find you, Grace," he said, his voice shaking as if he had a chill, his hands cold, his face hot, a tingling in his body, a sound in his ears like bells. "I want to tell you how—"

"Wait, duke—I want to hear it all—but wait a minute. There's something I want to ask you to do for me. Will you do me a favor, duke, a simple favor, but one that means the world and all to me?"

"Try me," said he, with boundless confidence.

"It's more than giving me your horse, duke; a whole lot more than that, but it'll not hurt you—you can do it, if you will."

"I know you wouldn't ask me to do anything that would reflect on my honesty or honor," he said, beginning to do a little thinking as his nervous chill passed.

"A man doesn't—when a man *cares*—" She stopped, looking away, a little constriction in her throat.

"What is it, Grace?" pressing her hand encouragingly, master of the situation now, as he believed.

"Duke"—she turned to him suddenly, her eyes wide and luminous, her heart going so he could see the tremor of its vibrations in the lace at her throat—"I want you to lend me to-morrow morning, for one day, just one day, duke—five hundred head of Vesta Philbrook's cattle."

"That's a funny thing to ask, Grace," said he uneasily.

"I want you to meet me over there where I cut the fence before sun-up in the morning, and have everybody out of the way, so we can cut them out and drive them over here. You can manage it, if you want to, duke. You will, if you—if you *care*."

"If they were my cattle, Grace, I wouldn't hesitate a second."

"You'll do it, anyhow, won't you, duke, for me?"

"What in the world do you want them for, just for one day?"

"I can't explain that to you now, duke, but I pledge you my honor, I pledge you everything, that they'll be returned to you before night, not a head missing, nothing wrong."

"Does your father know—does he—"

"It's for myself that I'm asking this of you, duke; nobody else. It means—it means—*everything* to me."

"If they were my cattle, Grace, if they were my cattle," said he aimlessly, amazed by the request, groping for the answer that lay behind it. What could a girl want to borrow five hundred head of cattle for? What in the world would she get out of holding them in her possession one day and then turning them back into the pasture? There was something back of it; she was the innocent emissary of a crafty hand that had a trick to play.

"We could run them over here, just you and I, and nobody would know anything about it," she tempted, the color back in her cheeks, her eyes bright as in the pleasure of a request already granted.

"I don't like to refuse you even that, Grace."

"You'll do it, you'll do it, duke?" Her hand was on his arm in beguiling caress, her eyes were pleading into his.

"I'm afraid not, Grace."

Perhaps she felt a shading of coldness in his denial, for distrust and suspicion were rising in his cautious mind. It did not seem to him a thing that could be asked with any honest purpose, but for what dishonest one he had no conjecture to fit.

"Are you going to turn me down on the first request I ever made of you, duke?" She watched him keenly as she spoke, making her eyes small, an inflection of sorrowful injury in her tone.

"If there's anything of my own you want, if there's anything you can name for me to do, personally, all you've got to do is hint at it once."

"It's easy to say that when there's nothing else I want!" she said, snapping it at him as sharp as the crack of a little whip.

"If there *was* anything—"

"There'll never be anything!"

She got up, flashing him an indignant look. He stood beside her, despising the poverty of his condition which would not allow him to deliver over to her, out of hand, the small matter of five hundred beeves.

She went to her horse, mightily put out and impatient with him, as he could see, threw the reins over her pommel, as if she intended to leave him at once. She delayed mounting, suddenly putting out her hands in supplication, tears springing in her eyes.

"Oh, duke! If you knew how much it means to me," she said.

"Why don't you tell me, Grace?"

"Even if you stayed back there on the hills somewhere and watched them you wouldn't do it, duke?" she appealed, evading his request.

He shook his head slowly, while the thoughts within it ran like wildfire, seeking the thing that she covered.

"It can't be done."

"I give you my word, duke, that if you'll do it nobody will ever lift a hand against this ranch again."

"It's almost worth it," said he.



She quickened at this, enlarging her guarantee.

"We'll drop all of the old feud and let Vesta alone. I give you my word for all of them, and I'll see that they carry it out. You can do Vesta as big a favor as you'll be doing me, duke."

"It couldn't be done without her consent, Grace. If you want to go to her with this same proposal, putting it plainly like you have to me, I think she'll let you have the cattle; if you can show her any good reason for it."

"Just as if I'd be fool enough to ask her!" she scorned.

"That's the only way."

"Duke," said she coaxingly, "wouldn't it be worth something to you, personally, to have your troubles settled without a fight? I'll promise you nobody will ever lift a hand against you again if you'll do this for me."

He started, looked at her sternly, approaching her a step.

"What do you know about anything that's happened to me?" he demanded.

"I don't know anything about what's happened, but I know what's due to happen if it isn't headed off."

Lambert did some hard thinking for a little while, so hard that it wrenched him to the marrow. If he had had suspicion of her entire innocence in the solicitation of this unusual favor before, it had sprung in a moment into distrust. Such a quick reversion cannot take place in the sentiment without a shock. It seemed to Lambert that something valuable had been snatched away from him, and that he stood in bewilderment, unable to reach out and retrieve his loss.

"Then there's no use in discussing it any more," he said, groping back, trying to answer her.

"You'd do it for her!"

"Not for her any quicker than for you."

"I know it looks crooked to you, duke—I don't blame you for your suspicions," she said with a frankness that seemed more like herself, he thought. She even seemed to be coming back to him in that approach. It made him glad.

"Tell me all about it, Grace," he urged.

She came close to him, put her arm about his neck, drew his head down as if to whisper her confidence in his ear. Her breath was on his cheek, his heart was afire in one foolish leap. She put up her lips as if to kiss him, and he, reeling in the ecstasy of his proximity to her radiant body, bent nearer to take what she seemed to offer.

She drew back, her hand interposed before his eager lips, shaking her head, denying him prettily.

"In the morning, I'll tell you all in the morning when I meet you to drive the cattle over," she said. "Don't say a word—I'll not take no for my answer." She turned quickly to her horse and swung lightly into the saddle. From this perch she leaned toward him, her hand on his shoulder, her lips drawing him in their fiery lure again. "In the morning—in the morning—you can kiss me, duke!"

With that word, that promise, she turned and galloped away.

It was late afternoon, and Lambert had faced back toward the ranch-house, troubled by all that he could not understand in that morning's meeting, thrilled and fired by all that was sweet to remember, when he met a man who came riding in the haste of one who had business ahead of him that could not wait. He was riding one of Vesta Philbrook's horses, a circumstance that sharpened Lambert's interest in him at once.

As they closed the distance between them, Lambert keeping his hand in the easy neighborhood of his gun, the man raised his hand, palm forward, in the Indian sign of peace. Lambert saw that he wore a shoulder holster which supported two heavy revolvers. He was a solemn-looking man with a narrow face, a mustache that crowded Taterleg's for the championship, a buckskin vest with pearl buttons. His coat was tied on the saddle at his back.

"I didn't steal this horse," he explained with a sorrowful grin. "I requisitioned it. I'm the sheriff."

"Yes, sir?" said Lambert, not quite taking him for granted, no intention of letting him pass on with that explanation.

"Miss Philbrook said I'd run across you up this way."

The officer produced his badge, his commission, his card, his letter-head, his credentials of undoubted strength. On the proof thus supplied, Lambert shook hands with him.

"I guess everybody else in the county knows me—this is my second term, and I never was taken for a horse-thief before," the sheriff said, solemn as a crow, as he put his papers away:

"I'm a stranger in this country, I don't know anybody, nobody knows me, so you'll not take it as a slight that I didn't recognize you, Mr. Sheriff."

"No harm done, duke, no harm done. Well, I guess you're a little wider known than you make out. I didn't bring a man along with me because I knew you were up here at Philbrook's. Hold up your hand and be sworn."

"What's the occasion?" Lambert inquired, making no move to comply with the order.

"I've got a warrant for this man Kerr over south of here, and I want you to go with me. Kerr's a bad egg, in a nest of bad eggs. There's likely to be too much trouble for one man. You do solemnly swear to support the constitution—"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Sheriff," Lambert demurred; "I don't know that I want to mix up in—"

"It's not for you to say what you want to do—that's my business," the sheriff said sharply. He forthwith deputized Lambert, and gave him a duplicate of the warrant. "You don't need it, but it 'll clear your mind of all doubt of your power," he explained. "Can we git through this fence?"

"Up here six or seven miles, about opposite Kerr's place. But I'd like to go on to the house and change horses; I've rode this one over forty miles to-day already."

The sheriff agreed. "Where's that outlaw you won from Jim Wilder?" he inquired, turning his eyes on Lambert in friendly appreciation.

"I'll ride him," Lambert returned briefly. "What's Kerr been up to?"

"Mortgaged a bunch of cattle he's got over there to three different banks. He was down a couple of days ago tryin' to put through another loan. The investigation

that banker started laid him bare. He promised Kerr to come up to-morrow and look over his security, and passed the word on to the county attorney. Kerr said he'd just bought five hundred head of stock. He wanted to raise the loan on them."

"Five hundred," said Lambert, mechanically repeating the sheriff's words, doing some calculating of his own.

"He ain't got any that ain't blanketed with mortgage paper so thick already they'd go through a blizzard and never know it. His scheme was to raise five or six thousand dollars more on that outfit and skip the country."

And Grace Kerr had relied on his infatuation for her to work on him for the loan of the necessary cattle. Lambert could not believe that it was all her scheme, but it seemed incredible that a man as shrewdly dishonest as Kerr would entertain a plan that promised so little outlook of success. They must have believed over at Kerr's that they had him pretty well on the line.

But Kerr had figured too surely on having his neighbor's cattle to show the banker to stake all on the chance of Grace being able to wheedle him into the scheme. If he couldn't get them by seduction, he meant to take them in a raid. Grace never intended to come to meet him in the morning alone.

One crime more would amount to little in addition to what Kerr had done already, and it would be a trick on which he would pride himself and laugh over all the rest of his life.

It seemed certain now that Grace's friendliness all along had been laid on a false pretense, with the one intention of beguiling him to his disgrace, his destruction, if disgrace could not be accomplished without it.

As he rode Whetstone—not quite recovered from his scorching, save for the hair of his once fine tail—beside the sheriff, Lambert had some uneasy cogitations on his sentimental blindness of the past; on the good, honest advice that Vesta Philbrook had given him. Blood was blood, after all. If the source of it was base, it was too much to hope that a little removal, a little dilution, would ennoble it.



"And yet," thought he, thumb in the pocket of his hairy vest where the little handkerchief lay, "and yet—"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE WILL-O'-THE-WISP.

THE Kerr ranch buildings were more than a mile away from the point where Lambert and the sheriff halted to look down on them. The ranch-house was a structure of logs from which the bark had been stripped, and which had weathered white as bones. It was long and low, suggesting spaciousness and comfort, and enclosed about by a white picket fence.

A winding trace of trees and brushwood marked the course of the stream that ran behind it. On the brink of this little water, where it flashed free of the tangled willows, there was a corral and stables, but no sign of either animal or human life about the place.

"He may be out with the cattle," Lambert suggested.

"We'll wait for him to come back, if he is. He's sure to be home between now and to-morrow."

So that was her home, that was the roof that had sheltered her while she grew in her loveliness. The soft call of his romance came whispering to him again. Surely there was no attainder of blood to rise up against her and make her unclean; he would have sworn that moment, if put to the test, that she was innocent of any knowing attempt to involve him to his disgrace. The gate of the world stood open to them to go away from that harsh land and forget all that had gone before, as the gate of his heart was open for all the love that it contained to rush out and embrace her, and purge her of the unfortunate accident of her birth.

After this, poor child, she would need a friend, as never before, with only her step-mother, as she had told him, in the world to befriend her. A man's hand, a man's heart—

"I'll take the front door," said the sheriff. "You watch the back."

Lambert came out of his softening dream, down to the hard facts in the case before

him with a jolt. They were within half a mile of the house, approaching it from the front. He saw that it was built in the shape of an L, the base of the letter to the left of them, shutting off a view of the angle.

"He may see us in time to duck," the sheriff said, "and you can bank on it, he's got a horse saddled around there at the back door. If he comes your way, don't fool with him; let him have it where he lives."

They had not closed up half the distance between them and the house when two horsemen rode suddenly round the corner of the L and through the wide gate in the picket fence. Outside the fence they separated with the suddenness of a preconcerted plan, darting away in opposite directions. Each wore a white hat, and from that distance they appeared as much alike in size and bearing as a man and his reflection.

The sheriff swore a surprised oath at sight of them, and their cunning plan to confuse and divide the pursuing force.

"Which one of 'em's Kerr?" he shouted as he leaned in his saddle, urging his horse on for all that it could do.

"I don't know," Lambert returned.

"I'll chance this one," said the sheriff, pointing. "Take the other feller."

Lambert knew that one of them was Grace Kerr. That he could not tell which, he upbraided himself, not willing that she should be subjected to the indignity of pursuit. It was a clever trick, but the preparation for it and the readiness with which it was put into play seemed to reflect a doubt of her entire innocence in her father's dishonest transactions. Still, it was no more than natural that she should bend every faculty to the assistance of her father in escaping the penalty of his crimes. He would do it himself under like conditions; the unnatural would be the other course.

These things he thought as he rode into the setting sun in pursuit of the fugitive designated by the sheriff. Whetstone was fresh and eager after his long rest, in spite of the twelve or fifteen miles which he had covered already between the two ranches. Lambert held him in, doubtful whether he would be able to overtake the fleeing rider

before dark with the advantage of distance and a fresh horse that he or she had.

If Kerr rode ahead of him, then he must be overtaken before night gave him sanctuary; if Grace, it was only necessary to come close enough to her to make sure, then let her go her way untroubled. He held the distance pretty well between them till sundown, when he felt the time had come to close in and settle the doubt. Whetstone was still mainly in reserve, tireless, deep-winded creature that he was.

Lambert leaned over his neck, caressed him, spoke into the ear that tipped watchfully back. They were in fairly smooth country, stretches of thin grass-lands and broken barrens, but beyond them, a few miles, the hills rose, treeless and dun, offering refuge for the one who fled. Pursuit there would be difficult by day, impossible by night.

Whetstone quickened at his master's encouragement, pushing the race hard for the one who led, cutting down the distance so rapidly that it seemed the other must be purposely delaying. Half an hour more of daylight and it would be over.

The rider in the lead had driven his or her horse too hard in the beginning, leaving no recovery of wind. Lambert remarked its weariness as it took the next hill, laboring on in short, stiff jumps. At the top the rider held in, as if to let the animal blow. It stood with nose close to the ground, weariness in every line.

The sky was bright beyond horse and rider, cut sharply by the line of the hill. Against it the picture stood, black as a shadow, but with an unmistakable pose in the rider that made Lambert's heart jump and grow glad.

It was Grace; chance had been kind to him again, leading him in the way his heart would have gone if it had been given the choice. She looked back, turning with a hand on the cantle of her saddle. He waved his hand, to assure her, but she did not seem to read the friendly signal, for she rode on again, disappearing over the hill before he reached the crest.

He plunged down after her, not sparing his horse where he should have spared him, urging him on when they struck the level

again. There was no thought in him of Whetstone now—only of Grace.

He must overtake her in the quickest possible time, and convince her of his friendly sympathy; he must console and comfort her in this hour of her need. Brave little thing, to draw him off that way, to keep on running into the very edge of night, that wild country ahead of her, for fear he would come close enough to recognize her and turn back to help the sheriff on the true trail. That's what was in her mind; she thought he hadn't recognized her, and was still fleeing to draw him as far away as possible by dark.

When he could come within shouting distance of her, he could make his intention plain. To that end he pushed on. Her horse had shown a fresh impulse of speed, carrying her a little farther ahead. They were drawing close to the hills now, with a growth of harsh and thorny brushwood in the low places along the runlets of dry streams.

Poor little bird, fleeing from him, luring him on like a trembling quail that flutters before one's feet in the wheat to draw him away from her nest. She didn't know the compassion of his heart, the tenderness in which it strained to her over the intervening space. He forgot all, he forgave all, in the soft pleading of romance which came back to him like a well-loved melody.

He fretted that dusk was falling so fast. In the little strips of valley, growing narrower as he proceeded between the abrupt hills, it was so nearly dark already that she appeared only dimly ahead of him, urging her horse on with unsparing hand. It seemed that she must have some objective ahead of her, some refuge which she strained to make.

He wondered if it might be the cow-camp, and felt a cold indraft on the hot tenderness of his heart for a moment. But, no; it could not be the cow-camp. There was no sign that grazing herds had been there lately. She was running because she was afraid to have him overtake her in the dusk, running to prolong the race until she could elude him in the dark, afraid of him, who loved her so!

They were entering the desolation of the



hills. On the sides of the thin strip of valley, down which he pursued her, there were great, dark rocks, as big as cottages along a village street. He shouted, calling her name, fearful that he should lose her in this broken country in the fast-deepening night. Although she was not more than two hundred yards ahead of him now, she did not seem to hear. In a moment she turned the base of a great rock, and there he lost her.

The valley split a few rods beyond that point, broadening a little, still set with its fantastic black monuments of splintered rock. It was impossible to see among them in either direction as far as Grace had been in the lead when she passed out of his sight. He pulled up and shouted again, an appeal

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

of tender concern in her name. There was no reply, no sound of the hoofs of her fleeing horse.

He leaned to look at the ground for tracks. No trace of her passing on the hard earth with its mangy growth of grass. On a little way, stopping to call her once more. His voice went echoing in that quiet place, but there was no reply.

He turned back, thinking she must have gone down the other branch of the valley. Whetstone came to a sudden stop, lifted his head with a jerk, his ears set forward, snorting an alarm. Quick on his action there came a shot, close at hand. Whetstone started with a quivering bound, stumbled to his knees, struggled to rise, floundered with groans.

# One Hundred Per Cent

by

Lee Landon



LUKE MCGILL, night police captain, was in the throes of writing a report to Chief Tommy Carew. It was intended to lie upon Carew's desk in the morning. Luke bent over his desk like a football-player about to charge an opposing line. He held his pen like a sword. His communication was parenthesized with groans, comma'd with sighs, and finally periodized with a grunt.

Finally he straightened and extended the paper to Bert Sims, the spectacled police reporter of the Aquaris *Evening News*.

"There!" syllabled Luke, clawing at his

red hair. "'Tis a quiet Sundah for a 'dhry' town, I'm a liar! An' 'tis a long time yet till Mondah mornin'!"

Grinning, the lathy reporter who "stood in" glanced over the crabbed cipher:

Aquaris, Oct. 20, '18.

CHIEF CAREW:

We got to look out for bootleggers; its certainly wet around here. Theres fifteen below at 8 P.M., an about fifteen hunderd drunks above, judging from reports. The patrol-cart was down on Leper strete takin in diverse members of the Committy of Forty Bums and oficer Lundigan come in from the north side with old Bill Prentiss in a wheel-

barow. Any one who thinks this is now a dropless town needs a undertaker; he's dead to the world.

Oficer Wild arested that niger the warrant was swore on for eatin the other one's ear off. He's some mussed up hisself, as the other coons tride to tare him apart afterward. He'll be ready to be arranged before the judge in the mornin.

I recomend you to get busy to-morro on matter of comitting Huckelbery Henry to the hot-air house. It dyed down for a while, but its up agan. That old geezer has seen his best nights; he ain't the man he used to be, an he never was. He scared a bunch of wimmen stiff Saturdah night on Peoples Square, startin Billy Sunday jew jitsu an preachin a sermon aganst short skirts. They said he talked unmodest about em. Beter sick the doctors onto him to-morro an shoo him to the gas house.

Huckelbery Henry was pickd before he grew. He's 100 % nuts.

LUKE MCGILL,  
Night Police Captain.

Bert Sims handed back the paper.

"About Huckleberry Henry," he protested mildly, "don't pick on the poor old relict. We're all nuts, you know, when it comes to that, only some of us don't happen to have been cracked yet."

"He's saw too many days an' caused too much throuble," replied Luke.

"Also joy," reminded Sims. "What would a county fair up this way amount to without Huckleberry Henry? What would the huckleberries, turning their wee azure bellies to the sun up at Poplar Plains, do without him to gather them? What—"

"G'wan," grinned Luke. "Don't you take a shy at him wid yer typewriter ivery now and then? The ould skate's harmless, I'll grant, but he makes the women nervous, an' I'm for the women! An' this short-skirt epidemic has hit him crazier 'n ever. He's a nuisance wid his personal sermons an' his dervish dancin'. Boy, 'tis war-times, an' the women's nerves musht be kep' ironed flat as possible.

"If you was a woman, what 'd you think av havin' a human ould titmouse leppin' at a gang av you on the sthreet, shpinnin' on wan toe, wavin' his wings, an' screechin' at you like a gorilla about yer fatted calves?"

"Not all of them—" murmured the ob-servant reporter; but McGill chanted on.

"He's harmless, ye say? I'll not say nay to that! But ye'll not deny he might not shtay that way! 'Tis a cop I've been this thirty year, an' there's no trustin' thim loonies! To-day they might set up wid a sick dog, an' to-morra they'd nail their ould grandmother to a tree! The map av a saint, an' the devil winkin' in the eyes av thim!

"This Huckleberry, he niver harmed a fly, but if he changed like the blink av yer eye he'd invent a new way av torture to kill the insect! Thim hollow-heads, they go along all their lives widout thinkin', or else thinkin' all t' wunst, an' then they fly off on some hunch av murther, an' there's a brand-new story for yer paper!

"'Twud not surprise me at all if this Huckleberry shud wan day run amick. An' then he'd kill that ould wife av his, in the shack just inside the county line up at Popular Plains, a new way! Maybe choke her to deat' wid huckleberries—"

The telephone upon his desk pealed a summons. He swung in his chair and grasped the receiver.

"Yis, yis! Hello!" he called, and listened. "Phwat's that?" he asked sharply. "Aw, all right!" he finally announced resignedly, and hung up. Absently he dropped the report he had just completed into an open drawer of his desk and closed it. He swung back in his chair.

"What's up, Luke?" asked Bert Sims.

With some difficulty Luke contrived to conceal a rather satisfied expression with a scowl.

"Speakin' of epidemics," he growled, "the short-skirt wan wid the women is a dom sight pleasanter 'n some others. Here's Chief Carew gone an' took the flu! He's got it light, but the docthor says he's to shtay in two or three days. That means two hours' sleep for your Uncle Luke, an' up firsht thing in the morn to hould down the chief's job. There's no relief for me till I can get wan of the boys in me place here for to-morra night."

"Too bad!" murmured Sims hypocritically. He knew the secret joy that flooded Luke's breast at the prospect of serving as acting chief. McGill, dissembling, turned to him a darkling brow.



"I'll get even for bein' robbed av me resht!" he threatened. "If Huckleberry Henry ain't left for the next town, y' can bet a commish av doctors 'll be houldin' an inquest over his brain before night, an' he'll travel over the clinkin' rails to Oriento the nixt day!"

Sims laughed and rose. "Well, Luke, see you in the morning."

McGill winked. "A-ha! Is the little lady singing in the choir to-night, an' is it to the church door ye'll go?"

"Right!" acquiesced Sims, lighting a cigar.

"'Tis into the church door ye'll walk together wan av these days," rallied the Irishman, "an' the ministher 'll say, 'Bless ye, me childher,' an' afther ye're wan, maybe you might amount to something, Bertie. I'm thinkin' she's a betther newspaperman than you!"

"Altogether better!" cheerfully acknowledged Sims, and went out.

All the elements of municipal government, from mayor to dog-catcher, were lodged in the city hall in Barr Street. Sims walked toward the pulsing hub styled People's Square, from which radiated streets like spokes toward the four winds. He proceeded down the square toward the Unitarian church, where he expected to meet Alice Preston, his *fiancée* and co-worker on the staff of the *Evening News*.

Midway he passed the big "show" windows of the Norris, Aquaris's leading hostelry. Occupying one of the chairs, wherefrom guests viewed the throngs which always circled the people's plaza of pleasant evenings, was a wizen, gorgeous little figure. Passing the glass and glancing inside as one's attention is involuntarily attracted as to the contents of an aquarium, Sims noticed this amazing creature. He grinned and nodded, receiving a stony glare.

"Not speaking, eh?" reflected Bert amusedly, continuing on toward the church. "All right, Henry! I was going to tip you off that McGill was after you, but go on and be railroaded for all I care. You're getting squeamish in your old age, over a column or two. Guess Luke was right."

The sartorial wonder in the chair in front

of the hotel window continued to glare after him till he was lost in the crowd. Then along came an Aquaris merchant and paused by the chair which held the nondescript.

"Evening, Henry," greeted the merchant. "How was the price of huckleberries last season? I haven't seen you in some time, Henry."

A pair of strange eyes flashed up at his face. Rather small, slaty eyes they were, lent the appearance of more of size than they possessed by a permanent distention of the pupils, that would have told an alienist at once of the state of the old man's mind, even had he been of conventional appearance rather than blatant of eccentricities.

These dilated pupils were never still. Hither and yon they were always darting, as if in search of the subtle balance that had been from his earliest youth denied his brain. The profoundest mystery of life was here—the death in life, in this case presenting the mask of merry Momus rather than that of Tragedy.

And deep down in those dilated pupils could be discerned, if one could intercept the restless, darting glances long enough to catch it, the old man's substitute for reason, by which he had fared through the north-land for many years, a "character."

It was the uncanny cunning, the instinct of a beast of the jungle that often outwits the trained mind of a sane, sure, poised man.

The face lighted by those queer eyes was drawn and webbed and leathered with years. Yet the movements of the long, gaunt body of Huckleberry Henry—folk had long forgotten his surname—were as agile as those of a boy.

As the merchant, smiling at the prospect of being entertained for a few moments, sank into the chair beside him, he abruptly threw one check-trousered leg, skin-tight, with flapping bottoms showing rows of unfastened buttons, over its fellow. Nervously, but with untrembling fingers and exactitude of motion, he relighted a ragged cigar.

Came his replying words, tumbling in a torrent, precisely clipped, invested with a flat, bucolic twang that was never excelled by any imitating vaudeville artist:

"No, Hiram, you ain't seen me in quite a spell. But that's your loss, Hiram; it ain't mine!"

"Now, about the price of huckleberries last summer, Hiram, I'll own up to ye that I didn't get as much per quart as I expected to, but I didn't expect to. So I'm tol'able satisfied, tol'able."

He chuckled weirdly. "Now, I guess, Hiram, you start to kid me, you come out like you allus have. You listen, Hiram, an' you'll hear what the gen'llemen to my right an' left is hearin'. It's your goat blattin'! You ast me about the price o' huckleberries. You know as much now as you did behind, don't you, Hiram? Anything more I can't tell you?"

His slaty eyes now bored into Hiram's. Deep in the enlarged pupils danced the little, mad, twin fiends that capered constantly through his whirling mind, the fiends that flung to him a mocking similitude of reason; that guided him erratically, but with a certain lurid brilliance, through the world he viewed distorted.

With perfect equanimity the fat, prosperous Hiram endured the caustic counter and the laughter it created among the guests. He had foreseen, through experience, what would be his fate when he approached "the Sage of Poplar Plains," as the north-country press had long since dubbed the famed vendor of huckleberries. But Hiram, whiling away an idle hour, was willing to serve as a cushion for Henry's lightning shafts. He invariably found the process interesting. The sage's ammunition was always different.

"Anything more you can't tell me?" he repeated, with a discreet wink at the interested circle, while he handed Henry a choice Havana and settled back luxuriously to be abused. "Why, yes, Henry; I'll bet you can't tell me your age. And I never could tell from your teeth, you old cuss, because you haven't got but three left."

Lighting the weed from his remnant, Henry displayed the trio of tabulated molars in an unctuous grin and elevated his feet, adorned with a pair of dingy tan spats, upon the window-sill. With his cane he tapped upon the floor for attention. To be noticed, to spiel, to hobnob with his

fellows as through a glass, darkly, and yet surprisingly face to face—this was his meat, his joy, his life!

"Now, I'm glad you ast me that, Hiram," he clacked, cunningly raising his strident voice to penetrate to all corners of the lobby. "What fangs I got, hits, Hiram, an' I don't leave 'em in a glass o' water by my bedstead nights, nuther, like you do!"

"Good!" acknowledged the merchant, amid the roars of the crowd. But his grin was now a little forced. Confound the old varmint, never before had he got under Hiram's hide! Who would have thought he ever would have noticed the new double set of false teeth? Especially when Hiram had practised concealing the fact?

"Now, about my age," complacently pursued Henry, his needlelike eyes perceiving the tethering of Hiram Gilch's "animal" after all these years, "I don't mind tellin' you, Hiram. I expect to live to be a hunderd if I don't slip—"

He stopped suddenly; a vagrant thought had cut in upon those attending his colloquy with the merchant—now, it was readily seen, for once abruptly ended.

Into the maelstrom of his memories tumbled that of the tall, young, spectacled police-court reporter of the *Evening News*, at whom he had scowled as Sims passed the window a little while before.

Immediately he scowled again and began to clack an indictment against the free and untrammelled press.

"You folks know that young Sims?" he demanded of the circle, suddenly aggrieved. "The reporter that does police for the *News*? Huh! I thought ye did! He thinks he is a godawful smart Aleck, he does! I don't care a dang what folks say about me, but be careful what they write, say we!"

"That pop-eyed young galoot Sims, I'm after him! Didja see the story he wrote up about me? He thinks he's a President Wilson with a pen; 'stead o' which he had ought to be confined in one. Had a lot o' fun with me, didn't he? Yah! I ain't no Joe Miller joke-book. I want to be took serious, I do, once in a while!"

He had forgotten the guests. His gaze



moodily sought the floor. He started muttering a disconnected monologue, for the time being wholly oblivious to his surroundings. The men around him found it rather eerie; including the discomfited Hiram, they moved away.

A traveling man stood by the cigar-case curiously watching him.

"How does he happen to be loose?" he asked the cigar clerk.

"A doctor examined him a couple of years ago; said he wasn't crazy," explained the young man.

"Then," demanded the drummer, "who is crazy?"

"The doc who examined him," nonchalantly added the clerk. "He was sent to Oriento the next year."

A half-hour passed. The number of men in the lobby had thinned. Remained the weird figure in the chair, glooming blankly at the tiled floor, enmeshed in a black, formless mood induced by his grievance that he was not taken seriously.

Came an insistent peal from the telephone booths. The young woman in charge received a call which seemed to cause her incredulity. After a moment she summoned a freckled bell-boy, giving him directions amid sundry giggles.

"Buttons," smiling to the tips of his ears, jauntily advanced to Huckleberry Henry, waddled in his chair, and tapped him on the thin but stalwart shoulder.

"Lady wants to talk wit' you, sir," he informed him with exaggerated politeness.

"Huh? Wha-what?" demanded Henry, starting up nervously.

The bell-boy raised his tone for the benefit of those remaining in the lobby.

"Lady at the telephone, sir, wants to chat wit' you. She's got a sweet voice, too, but I guess she don't care w'at she does wit' it."

With the gibe Huckleberry Henry was his addled but competent self again. His puckered eyes and lean and withered lips together flashed in fiendish glee.

"Let the lady do w'at she likes with her voice, Turkey Face! You keep your gobble in yer neck!"

He leaped up threateningly. The discomfited boy scuttled away. Huckleberry

Henry cackled two crackling bars of discordant laughter and strode majestically toward the booths.

All eyes followed him curiously. Sardonially he was unique. The rainbow was his inspiration. He wore a long-skirted coat, affected by dudes of the era of Grover Cleveland. A scarlet vest and a hat of vivid crimson lent to his long, spare person, of a height of an even sixty inches, touches remindful of the blackbird in Rostand's "Chanticleer." His great, horny hands, possessed in former days, as some men there remembered, of enormous power, swung nearly to his knees.

He entered the booth indicated by the operator and seated himself upon the stool, applying the receiver to a huge ear. A silvery "Hello!" floated to him. Immediately his omnipresent lingual reservoir fresheted in speech.

"Hello! I swan, the Lord is kind to old sinners! What fair dame wants to chew a while with Huckleberry Henry? If it's huckleberries you want, lady, I'm grievin' to remind you they ain't a thing on Poplar Plains now but the poplars, an' it's due to snow a lot ere the birdies nest again.

"Mebbe you're aimin' to ast me to pick on a banjo underneath your window? I done that once, mebbe you remember; toured the north country a month till the cops stopped me. I had a reppytor of two pieces. One was 'Nearer, My God, to Thee,' an' t'other was the same thing, played backward, like the Kaiser's retreat. I was bestest on the second.

"What's that? Oh, you're Miss Alice Preston, of the *Evenin' News*? Do I remember you? Well, I sh'd say I do! You found me drunk an' half froze on Alling Street last winter, an' you hustled help for me. I'd been sure nearer the Lord tonight if it hadn't been for you! Huh? You're phonin' from your house? An' you got somethin' to tell me? What—what's *that*?

"Ho, ho!" he snarled vengefully, after a pause. "*That's* their game, is it? Luke McGill goin' to send me to Oriento, eh? An' you're tellin' me so I kin git out o' the city before he grabs me? Well, that's very kind of you!"

He listened for another moment. "Who told you, you say?" he clicked. "What! That young Sims, of the *News*? An' he's there with you now? I've got a bone to pick with that young feller! Huh? Won't I forget it an' let bygones be bygones? Say, Miss Preston, you can love yer enemy arter he's *dead*! Well, much obleeged for the tip. Good night, Miss Preston, good night!"

He banged the receiver into place and left the booth, slamming the door. His wrinkled face was a thunder-cloud. He strode out of the hotel, muttering rapidly to himself while he clasped and loosened his big fingers.

The drummer who had remained talking with the cigar clerk watched him hurtle through the door and turn in the direction of Barr Street, wherein was situated the city hall.

"Tell you, Ed," asserted the commercial traveler, "'t isn't safe to leave a bat like that at large. Take it from me, some day the rockets inside his cage will go off, and he'll carve up the community promiscuous with an ax!"

Languidly the cigar clerk shifted his weight to the other foot.

"Oh, nothing like that!" he drawled. "Henry would never wind up by doing anything as common as that! Depend upon it, my friend, when Henry springs anything like that, it's bound to be sprung in some brand-new way!"

Luke McGill, as the first faint streamers of dawn streaked the autumnal Monday sky, sat dozing in his chair. He roused at the step of burly Lieutenant Briggs entering the office.

"Aw, is it you, Al?" greeted Luke, yawning a man's size yawn. "Listen! Take the desk until Ambrose comes on at seven thirty. Chief Carew is fluey; I'll shlape in me pants in his office on the cot, an' you knock on me door whin Ambrose comes. An' I'll act till Carew is back."

He propelled his two hundred pounds of bone and muscle into the chief's office, threw off coat and vest, let down his suspenders, and removed his shoes, extended his five-and-ten upon the cot, and closed

his reddened eyes. Soon his honkings displayed the depth of his slumber.

The intermittent blasts of locomotive whistles, near the Barr Street crossing at the foot of the hill below the city hall, disturbed him not at all. Nor did the ululating sirens of the factories at seven o'clock.

Presently came a banging upon the door of McGill's improvised boudoir.

"Seven thirty, chief!" piped the ordinarily resonant tones of Lieutenant Ambrose Coyne, in simulation of the "coffin-nail voice" of a bell-boy. "Will ye have yer shave with yer ice-water?"

Luke groaned and rolled to a sitting posture, grinning ruefully at memories of rest "broke off in the middle."

"Is it you, Ambrose?" he called. "Thank you, go t' blazes! Phwere's Briggs?"

"Gone home. Didja want to catch the 5 A.M. train south, maybe? I called ye up to tell ye to go to sleep again; the train has gone."

"If I'd just got up fresh in the mornin'," retorted Luke, "an' cudn't think of a younger wan than that, I'd go to bed again!"

Chuckling, Coyne returned to his desk, and McGill returned to the lavatory for a hasty toilet, and then to the restaurant across the street for breakfast.

Returning, his manly, brass-buttoned chest expanded with justified pride as he reentered Carew's office. He was to be acting chief for the day—perhaps for two or three days!

Seating himself at the desk of power, he opened the routine mail, and glanced longingly at the letters he might not touch—those addressed peculiarly to the *real* chief. The tread of the patrolmen starting out on the day's beats had ceased. Luke had despatched Lieutenant Coyne to watch the doings of some suspected "bootleggers," who were alleged to be supplying sundry of the soldiers from the garrison of Mackley's Bay, adjacent to Aquaris, with illicit liquor. The acting chief was alone in the office.

Suddenly he espied a report, lying by the pile of mail. A glance apprized him that it had been turned in after he repaired



to rest in the chief's office. Evidently, Coyne had left it upon the desk when he was at breakfast.

McGill read the report, which was from the pen of Patrolman Lundigan, one of the night men now gone home. He scowled as he read:

At 12 Midnight I was at the end of my beat on Laccoon stret lookin out over the flats toward the Dinimite house of the public works deppartment. There was Huckelbury Henri just goin away from there. I holered at him an asked him what he was doin, and he thumbed his nose at me an legged it. I went there an the dore was fast, but you cant tell. Theres a careless old padlock onto it an any key most wud unlock it, as the public works deppartment has been told more than once. It may be all right, but the squirls from the park have ben hoppin after Huckelbury Henri for a long time now. I thought I beter report it, caus you never can tell what diinimite won't do.

Acting Chief McGill sat tilted back in his chair, twisting the report in his hands. Temporarily the matter of attending to the committing of Henry to Oriento, which he had assured Bert Sims would be attended to this day, had been swept from his mind. Uneasily he now wondered if it should not have been done early the previous week, when Henry had come to town from his shack upon the outer fringe of Poplar Plains.

When a guy was one hundred per cent nuts, delays were always dangerous! At which moment the telephone bell at his elbow rang an insistent summons. Luke started nervously and grabbed the instrument.

"Hello!" he called. "This is the chief's office. Phwat's wanted?"

In reply came a voice he recognized, raised a little in unwonted excitement. It was that of Raymond Hayden, managing editor of the *Aquaris Evening News*.

"Hello!" called Hayden. "That you, McGill? Say, I had a telephone message from Huckleberry Henry just now; he wouldn't say from where he phoned. It was a booth call; I'm trying to find out from where, but central was chewing too much gum—"

"Yes, yes!" cut in McGill impatiently

at the slight pause. Something was wafted with the voice, throbbing over the wire—something that set odd pricklings along the big captain's spine; something that made him catch his breath in suspense.

"I thought the old geezer was fooling at first," continued Hayden, "but there was something in his tone that meant deadly earnest. He said he was on his way to kill Sims; Sims had written some story about him he didn't like. Sims has just come in—"

"Any signs of Henry yet?" demanded McGill. Cold beads of sweat broke out upon his brow. His dilated eyes mechanically turned toward Patrolman Lundigan's report, which he had flung upon his desk when reaching for the telephone. A sharp regret pierced the tumult of his faculties. Why had he not set in motion the machinery for deporting Henry to the insane asylum the previous week?

"No," answered Hayden swiftly, "not yet—wait!"

McGill waited in strained suspense, scraping his heels. He heard the weird murmur of distant voices, the blur of indistinguishable words. He heard a horrified exclamation; then into his ear poured tense words, tumbling over one another:

"McGill! Hurry here! An office-boy just came in; he says Henry is headed for here, muttering, *and waving a stick of dynamite!*"

McGill, blindly groping for his hat, jammed it upon his red head and fairly ran out of the building. In front was a taxicab-driver whom he knew.

"Tom!" he gasped. "To the *News* office, quick! An' then dhrive away from there! Niver mind why!"

The four blocks were quickly covered. McGill leaped from the taxi. The aura of fear had spread to the driver. Without understanding the concretely urgent reason for haste, he drove rapidly away, as Luke had directed.

Luke bolted into the city room. There stood a quiet but white-faced group, headed by Hayden. With them were Bert Sims and his *fiancée*, Alice Preston, a brown-haired, blue-eyed, slender girl in the plain,

sensible business woman's costume of the day. She was editor and reporter of the woman's page.

Upon her flashed McGill's glance.

"She should not be here!" he cried. "None av ye should shstay! Clear out! 'Tis a temptation to him if he comes!"

The girl's blue eyes showed wider than any one there had ever previously seen them—but they remained calm. She looked at Sims, standing at her side, then at Hayden. They returned the look with strained smiles.

She spoke, and in her low tone there was no tremor.

"We're newspaper folk, captain, and we won't run, any more than policemen. We stay with the ship, sink—or rise!"

McGill's eyes flashed irrepressible admiration. He started for the window.

"Maybe 'twas a bluff," he began. "He may not—"

"Listen!"

Hayden whispered the word. They all turned and stood transfixed, a half-dozen of them, listening in uncanny silence broken only by the quick, measured, nervous tread ascending the stairway—a tread they all instinctively knew as they visualized the gaudy, hurrying figure they had often seen in the streets of Aquaris, at the county fair, where not.

They heard the steps reach the landing, and without pause turn to the corridor down which they had often walked for purposes of "confab" in days before their owner's increasing irritability had excluded newspapers and their workers from his good graces.

Through the open door walked Huckleberry Henry and faced them.

There was a terrible change in his lined and withered face. Instead of the wide smile they recalled so well, he was scowling blackly.

His slaty eyes, rolling madly, darted hither and yon, scanning the blanched faces before him. Deep down in the distorted pupils leered and grimaced the twin imps that had early ousted his reason.

Swinging loosely in his big right hand was a long, thick, round stick, brown-hued, promising the most frightful of deadlines;

alike the servant of man's constructive effort and the roaring instrument of chaos.

McGill, watching him warily, took a stealthy step toward him. Catlike, Henry perceived the motion; catlike he precipitated a thunderous moment.

Instantly his big fingers released their hold upon the deadly munition. Instantly, too, he stooped, with the swiftness of light, and caught it again before it had thudded upon the floor.

Grasping it, he shook it in McGill's face. He screeched an ultimatum, while madness flared in his eyes.

"See? You stand back, you big stiff! *You make another move at me, an' it 'll hit the floor, hard!*"

They shrank back, voiceless. All but Alice Preston, who, though colorless and staring, found a dry voice of appeal.

"Henry—"

His free hand negligently waved a gesture of interruption.

"'S all right, Miss Preston. You was good to me. You won't be hurt. I like the ladies, I do. It's that spectacled pup beside you I'm arter. He wrote me up; I want his heart; I come to get it!"

He rolled his terrible eyes at Bert Sims, eyes more horrible than they had ever seen; his thin lips writhed in an incredible snarl, displaying his few yellowed fangs.

Upon which growled announcement of sinister intention Sims answered in fashion that would permanently attest his manhood in the community of Aquaris. His reply was made indomitably and with stiffened lips.

"Yes, Henry; I heard you were after me. And I'll go with you, anywhere you like. But don't kill me—here!"

Beside him sounded a low moan of protest; Alice Preston's slender fingers convulsively pressed his arm. He glanced down at her; what she saw in his eyes behind the lenses would inspire her enduring respect.

"Wait, Henry!"

It was McGill's voice. During the colloquy the nimble brain under the red thatch had been working with professional coolness. It was a brain disciplined by years of working out of tight places.



Distrustfully the madman, who had been glaring at Sims, now looked toward the police captain.

"Well," he snapped to McGill, "I'm a waitin'!"

"Now, Henry," persuasively wheedled McGill, voicing a memory that had flashed to him of a tenet which Huckleberry Henry had preached much throughout his hectic years, "you've always been a gheat upholder av law an' ordher, ain't you?"

Henry's eyes lost their wild glare. The little imps, deep in the enlarged pupils, twinkled. A complacent smirk split the almost toothless visage. He stood swinging the deadly brown stick that he was carrying this day in place of his cherished cane. He swung it with nerve-shocking carelessness, but it was observed that his fingers grasped it closely.

"Yes," he clacked, eying McGill askance. "I've upholden it. What about it?"

"Yet," pursued Luke argumentatively, "ye come up here to kill a man, defyin' law an' ordher. How d'ye reconcile it wid yer conscience, man?"

"A conscience I ain't got," retorted Henry stubbornly, "no more'n you, Luke McGill! It's for law an' order I'm proposin' to kill this four-eyed yahoo, Luke. I got a perfect right to kill him. I looked it up in the Scriptures last night, to make sure, an' it was there. I disremember the passage, an' I ain't noways goin' to take the time to look it up again, nuther. Why," nervously fumbling his munition, "the dang lath ought to be dead afore now!"

His voice had risen. Lightninglike, though he dared not approach the lunatic, McGill thought of another point of his subtle argument.

"Yes, Henry," he conceded, "we all know you got a right to kill Sims here, but there's wan thing ye've forgot."

"What's that?" demanded Henry suspiciously.

McGill turned upon him a steady, accusing eye. "I think ye're violatin' the Sullivan law," he said gravely. "It includes dynamite as well as pistols or knives. Dynamite, Henry, is a deadly weapon. Have ye a permit to carry it?"

For an instant endured strained silence.

Over Henry's leathery face flitted a bewildered, uncertain expression. His needle-like eyes seemed to expand the more.

"Why, no, Luke!" he conceded. "D'ye know, I never thought of that. Do I have to have a permit?"

"Sure ye do!" urged McGill, quick to press his advantage. "Now I'll tell ye. Ye want to observe law an' ordher, like ye always have, an' I'll tell ye w'at we'll do. We'll shtep down to the city hall together an' see Judge O'Donnell. Ye exshplain what ye want, an' he'll make out yer permit, an' ye can then come back here an' kill Sims accordin' to law. W'at d'ye say?"

Again endured the suspense. Three pairs of eyes among them steadily watched the lunatic—McGill's, Sims's, and Alice Preston's. Doubtfully, cunningly, his slaty eyes darted to their faces in turn, while his clouded mind debated the question McGill had brought up.

Finally he nodded decisively. "That sounds reason'ble, Luke," he conceded. "Fair to middlin' reason'ble, I sh'd say!"

"Fine!" wheedled Luke, throwing his final card of diplomacy. "Then you hand me that dynamite, an' we'll shtart."

Leaped again into the wrinkled face its heritage of cunning, gifts from the box of *Pandora* lent by the twin little fiends that rioted in his eyes.

"Oh, no, y' don't, Luke!" he jeered. "Huckleberry Henry can carry his own stick! I'd be feared to hand it over to you; your Irish hand might slip! No, sirree, I'll walk down to the city hall with you an' get that permit, but I'll carry this little insterment o' justice! You walk on your side o' the walk, Luke, an' I'll walk on mine!"

A few paces behind McGill and Henry, as they entered the cross street that led to Barr Street and the city hall, walked Hayden, Sims, and Alice Preston. Again Sims pleaded with her.

"Alice, can't I induce you to go back? It isn't safe for you—"

"It's as safe for me as for you and Mr. Hayden," she retorted with firmness. "I won't go back unless you two do! I'm going to see it out!"

"It will be all right," put in Hayden, with an assumption of confidence he was far from feeling. "McGill will get him going into the door and grab the thing before he can drop it—or there may be another policeman inside to help."

His voice was hoarse, his hands were trembling slightly with the reaction from the protracted strain in the office. But, with his companions, he resolutely followed "in the wake of danger," a habit of newspaper folk the world over.

As McGill and Henry—who had walked widely apart, McGill deferring to threatening gestures with the munition—neared the city hall, came the ringing of an engine bell from the railroad station. Were audible the sounds of a train gathering momentum.

Opposite the entrance to the municipal building the air was rent by a shriek like that of a catamount. Huckleberry Henry swerved from the captain's side and ran down the hill toward the Barr Street crossing, wildly waving the brown object of deadlines.

"My God!" yelled McGill, "*he's goin' to smash the train!*" and quickly put after him.

The years had added their poundage. The meager figure ahead, despite advanced years, was nimbler. Even before the train, gathering speed with every turn of the wheel, had passed the gates, the old man had reached them and crawled under, wildly waving the long, round, brown stick.

Staring, sickened, breathless, four figures came racing behind him, anticipating the moment of crashing doom. The newspaper folk were close upon McGill's heels.

The last car, a passenger-coach, rumbled by at fifteen miles an hour. Came the flash of a clawlike hand—Huckleberry Henry was safely upon the lower step; a simian spring landed him upon the platform, just as the quartet ducked under the gate and stood together fairly upon the tracks.

Henry whirled; his devilish puckered face grinned vengefully at them above the railing; again his eyes were lighted with a bedlam glare. One hand clutched the iron rail; the other whipped above his head, grasping the brown stick.

His basilisk gaze was fixed upon McGill, standing transfixed with horror a little in advance as Henry's arm launched forward.

Every figure there stood in despairing paralysis—all but one. As the brown stick came whirring and whirling, straight toward the police captain's head, there was a shrill cry, followed by instant action, as the train whizzed for the north and the county line.

Out from the group, rushing toward the menace, came Alice Preston. Her hands, upflung desperately, clawed the air; caught the round, brown stick—and held fast. Gasping, she reeled a little, then faced about.

To the men, who now made shift to approach her, she exposed blue eyes that were bigger and rounder than ever they would be again. Into her pale face surged banners of color. From her red lips burst a peal of hysterical laughter.

The round, brown stick dropped from her relaxing hands to the road-bed. No accompanying reverberating roar—apart from the diminishing thunders of the train—drowned the tremulous cadence of her two illuminating, incredible, astounding words:

"*It's—wood!*"

The faces of three men, crowding around her, were studies fit for the inspiration of an impressionistic painter.

Next came the words of Luke McGill, accenting mounting spasms of bewilderment as he investigated the brown "joker" in his inquiring hands.

"Wood it is; so's me bean! Yes, an' 'tis hollow! An' here's the cap to it; it comes off. An' here's a note jammed into it—'tis for meself!"

He began to read the missive. It was as crabbed and misspelled as one of his own police reports.

But McGill was at no trouble to absorb its message. The spirit of sprightly mockery in the first two lines caused him to guard the note from three other pairs of inquiring eyes. Impolitely he turned his broad, blue back and read on:

LUKE MAGILL:

I hear your aimin to frame me for a nut cake. Well thats all rite you big irish stew. Ime aimin to frame you too.



I was tipt off a year ago you was goin to get me shot to orento. I fixt this stick then I spent a lot o time paintin it to look jus like dinahmite but I know I got it all rite all rite. Folks feres dinahmite a damsie moren the lord I notice. Its somethin they hafto respec. I know Ive got it cause I painted it from a dinahmite modl. Yeres ago I was a painter before I went in so mutch for inteerior decratin but my old hand aint lost its cunnin by a jugfull.

When I was tipt off by a nice lady on your fel desines I was al reddy for Ive carried this stick for a yere since I hurd what you was up to. I hurd Carue was sick an you was on an I got a program lade out on witch Ile haul you into it so help me god. Ive let Lundigan see me near the dinahmite house an I know hele report to you. An Ile thro a scare into the News office an youll get a SOS call an youll be there you big stiff. An maybe that young sims will keep you off me arter this.

No orento for me you roamin holiday. Ime aimin to get this note to you somehow arter I catch the train north this mornin an hop off at the county line. By then my wife an the mewl will have moved my shack 100 yards across the county line. I own 100 yards on each side the line and you cant touch me in adams county. If you an adams county tries to nab me together Ile play you the damdest game o tag you ever plade an youll both be it.

Another thing. Ive hurd you say I haled from Populer Planes. Your a lyre. Its Popler Planes p-o-p-l-e-r you rummy.

Arter this you take me more sirius you dang irish fool.

HUCKELBERRY HENRY.

Near McGill a sweet girlish voice was modestly disclaiming to a pair of wondering masculine coworkers upon the *News* any special heroism on the part of its owner in the "crisis" just safely passed.

"Of course, it's ridiculous, but it *looked* real. And what I did was nothing at all. You know, I was the crack forward of the girls' basket-ball team. And I felt, somehow, I *had* to stand by and go along with you, and do anything I could, for—don't you see?—I was thinking all the time how I insisted, after Bert told me what they were going to do with Henry, upon calling him up and warning him. I felt responsible, don't you see? But now—Bert—I feel—just a wee bit—shaky. It was just a horrible joke of course, but somehow—well Huckleberry Henry makes me feel so—*nervous!*"

Luke McGill did not hear the voice. He did not see the two *News* men supporting the girl, now white with the inevitable reaction, to an adjacent drug-store for a restorative. He stood glaring down at Henry's note, his fingers pinching the paper vengefully. The Huckleberry person had launched the deadliest of munitions—in verbal form. He hated to admit it, even to himself, but he had got the worst of the encounter.

"Wants me to take him 'more serious,' does he?" he muttered. "How in th' hell could I take him more seriouser 'n I did?"

Acting Chief of Police Luke McGill sat a little later in the office of the absent Carew. He was reading over a report written in his own crabbed hand. He had dropped it into a drawer of his desk the night before when came the telephone message of Carew's illness. Thoughtfully Luke studied the final line of that report:

Huckelberry Henry was pickd before he grew. He's 100% nuts.

Luke McGill shook his red head. He pondered for a space. He nodded, relieved. He grabbed a pen like a sword. Grunting, he bent to his task. He crossed out the final line and below it he painstakingly wrote a revision.

He finished. He sighed. He leaned upon a blotter like an office-boy upon a letterpress.

He tilted back in his chair, holding the amended report in front of him. In his freckled face remained nothing of resentment, of malice, of uncharitableness. Rather it reflected the nobler attributes of his mercurial Irish nature; its generosity, its sense of humor, its admiration.

A human fox was paying his tribute to the venerable daddy of 'em all. Incidentally, Luke had seesawed clean to the other side of the eternal question of one hundred per cent. Who, indeed, are *sane*?

The concluding line of the report to Chief Carew, which Luke would keep in his own possession as an heirloom, now read as follows:

Huckelberry Henry ain't never ben pickd. He's 100% Wise.

# The Devil's Riddle

by Edwina Levin

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE NIGHT WORE ON.

AS the time for Esther's marriage drew nearer, Sam began haunting the post-office. He had not heard a word since her letter stating that her marriage had been postponed until September 1. He received Ma's wordy telegram, in which she told him exactly how things were with Esther, and demanding that he get that doctor to New York before the wedding. The other telegram she had sent to Elvira, and had received service on it that Barnes was out of town.

Esther's telegram to Sam was received at the same time as Ma's. He put both in his pocket, consulted a calendar, found a railroad time-table on the postmaster's desk, then mounted the big bay and galloped home, getting there before the sun had reached the zenith.

He did not unsaddle the big bay, however; but fed and watered him and went in to get his own dinner. For once he left the dishes unwashed and went outside where there was room for a man to think. He took out both telegrams and spelled them out. When he had finished he pushed his hat far back on his head and stared off toward the hills.

"Well, I'm dummed if women ain't plumb curious," he remarked at last. "That fool doc don't deserve her no way at all; but I allow he must ha' been purty soft on

her to hunt her up after five year. Then flyin' off like that warn't nothin' but fool jealousy which there ain't no way of stoppin' as I know of. Ef I did I wouldn't be so gosh darn jealous myself of every man 'at looks at her. Yes, I allow he jest naturally couldn't help hit. Howsomever, hit don't make no never mind 'bout him. Hit's what *she* wants as counts."

He sat long, staring into the distance, his eyes resting, for once, unseeingly on his beloved hills. After calculating to a nicety how much time he had to spare, Sam went about his work in a thoughtful mood.

"Well, now, hit was me she telegraphed fur—not him," he ruminated, "and if she air plumb bound to marry somebody she don't love, I allow hit might as well be me as anybody—well, I reckon. She don't like this artist feller no better 'n she do me—and blame my skin, not es well; or she wouldn't a telegraphed me to come git her. I wonder if she meant she'd marry me?"

That Sam might put this construction on her telegram was a thing that Esther, in her troubled state of mind, had not once thought of.

He carried the telegrams around as he did the chores, muttering from time to time. He made all arrangements to be away for some days; then dressed, and mounted the big bay. Outside the gate he paused to consider. "That fool doc oughter have his daylight's punched out; but blame my skin, I ain't the man as can do hit."

This story began in *The Argosy* for April 19.



He started off toward Great Falls, the big bay eating up the miles in an easy, swinging gallop.

"Yep, I'll build her a fine house an' git some carpets an' some of them curt'ins that you roll up on a stick."

He sighed heavily as his eyes rested on Crown Butte. Directly he spied a big rattler lying dead by the side of the road. He dismounted and turned it over with the toe of his boot, seeming to study it intently. Sam stood and looked earnestly at the harmless mottled sign of past danger.

"Kill or git killed," the cow-man muttered. "That's between man an' snakes, howsomever—not between men. I allow I ain't never took no mean advantage of nobody; but—she telegraphed for me. Mebby so hit's me she wants. Old lady Frank don't know everything."

He turned the rattler over on its back and slowly mounted the big bay again. This time he held the horse down to a walk. He had plenty of time in which to reach Vaughn and catch the dummy into Great Falls in time to get the night train going East.

Sam's mental processes, when the big bay was under him, were always marked by the motion of the horse.

Now the big bay shook his head impatiently at his master's evident indecision.

"He wusn't a lovin' her or he wouldn't 'a' let her go East alone an' come out of his way to ast about *her*," he said aloud, as usual making no discrimination except in his own mind about Maida's and Esther's relation to Barnes. "An' I allow old lady Frank ain't no fool; an' hit takes a woman to know a woman."

Still, he rode slowly on toward Great Falls.

"Ef it warn't that when I make up my mind to somethin' hell hitself cain't stop me, ef I git a chanst at it, an' I mostly don't care who gits hurt. But even a damned rattler gives a man warnin' before he strikes. An' by God is it her that I want, or is it her wants that I want?"

A sudden kick of Sam's right heel on the flank of the big bay, a sudden jerk on the right rein, and the horse, wheeling suddenly back, broke into a smart swinging gallop that indicated the manner to Sam's question

had been found, and his decision reached. He was headed toward the Truman ranch.

Miss Mattie, who was recovering much more slowly than was necessary, as both she and Barnes knew, was in the back yard when Sam arrived. She sent him to the field to find Jim.

The cow-man drew rein about twenty feet from the doctor. He had come ten miles—he couldn't go those twenty feet.

"Come here," he commanded, while the big bay champed to get at the wheat.

"I reckon you can't make me, Sam," replied Barnes with a twinkle in his brown eyes.

"I allow I'm willin' to try agin," Sam replied; then burst out: "Come here you—fool. Hit's about—her."

Barnes covered those twenty feet in "nothing"; nor did he take any notice of the epithet that ordinarily would have dragged the man who uttered it from his horse.

Sam handed him Esther's telegram, saying as he did so:

"Go git her if you want her; an' ef you're sich a jackass as not to want her, I'll go. I've lost good time now comin' over here to fetch you the telegraph; I done hit for her."

"But—but she wired *you* to come and get her," Barnes said dazedly.

"Ef I didn't *know* she—wanted you, you—do you think I'd a rid over here fur you? I'd 'a' seen you in hell fust."

The power of this speech sent Barnes racing over the wheat-fields. Sam overtook him.

"Here," he said, dismounting. "You ain't got no time to lose ef you ketch the night train out of Great Falls."

Barnes mounted the bay without a word.

He hesitated. "Sam—" He choked. "Sam, I—"

"Ah, go to hell." Sam turned his back squarely. He followed the physician in on foot.

A perfect storm of emotions was whirling in Jim Barnes's heart and mind. It was as if suddenly, without warning, the great funnel of a cyclone had dipped down into a quiet field and picked him up bodily

and spun him along, giving him not even time to think or feel. He was conscious of a great joy in the speed and motion of it; but a greater fear of the end.

Esther wanted him. Sam knew. It was joy ineffable. He was on his way to get her! But would he be in time? The very question caught his heart in a fearful vise and twisted and tore it out of all reason. He *would* get there in time—he *would*!

Sam reached the ranch-house just as the doctor, satchel in hand, was mounting his own horse. They rode away together.

Barnes missed the night train, but the morning train would get him into New York at nine forty-seven on the morning of September 1. Nine forty-seven! Surely she would not be married before that time. He could get a taxi. He ought to be at her place by—well, close around ten o'clock. They couldn't be married before ten! At least people didn't generally marry so early in the morning. Eleven at the earliest—maybe twelve, or in the afternoon.

Round and round went Barnes's mind as he sped toward New York. August 29, August 30, August 31. Yes, he would surely get there in time to stop it. No doubt came to him about taking her. She loved him. Sam knew! Otherwise he would not have sent him.

Nine forty-seven! It would take him three minutes to get out of the train and to the street. How many blocks was it? Thank God, it was so near! Ten minutes ought to be ample time—ten o'clock! Surely she would not—round and round his mind went, over and over—nine forty-seven! Three minutes to—

Lack of sleep, insufficient food, and the severe strain began telling on him. His mental processes narrowed down to the hideous count. Every other thought was shut out. Even Esther became vague in his mind—the end of the count.

A storm had been brewing all day on August 31. He hardly noticed it. Toward the middle of the afternoon it broke—a veritable cloudburst, so thick and fierce that the train began to move more cautiously. It crept stealthily through the blinding downpour that made even the powerful

headlight almost useless. The rain beat against the windows as if it would batter them in.

Suddenly he became aware of their decreased speed. Inquiring of a brakeman, he learned the reason. An impotent atom, the slave of an inexorable monster that he could not urge forward by one revolution of the wheels, he sat on the edge of his seat, his body leaning forward as though hoping in that way to go ahead a little faster. His very muscles ached with the effort he expended. He left off counting and bent all his energies toward pushing that train ahead.

Why hadn't he wired her to wait for him? Suppose she *hadn't* sent for him! Sam knew. He could have made it as a plea. She couldn't have been offended even if Sam were wrong. And what cared he for pride? She could do no more than—what she had done before. He would send the telegram from the next station.

Unable to sit still, he got up and went forward. There was not so much as a flash of lightning to show them where they were. Even the trainmen could not be sure. How late would they be? They were now fifty minutes late, as near as they could figure it. But they might make it up and run in on time if the storm would let up pretty soon. With that he had to be content. Anyway, there was hope in it. He would send the telegram, though, in case they didn't make it up.

Suddenly, as though the clouds had let fall their entire reserve, the rain stopped—stopped completely. They would be seventy minutes late into the next station.

Barnes sank back in a state almost of exhaustion as the train began to gather a little speed. As he did so the engine stopped with a jump. The cars quivered and rattled, bumped back against each other, then came to a dead stand. Everybody was up. What had happened? Barnes made his way through the smoker.

"What's the trouble?" he shouted.

"Engine off the track," a man answered. "Rails spread. Good thing we were going slow."

"Does this mean that we'll get in late?" Barnes foolishly demanded.



"Maybe a couple of hours, maybe longer." The conductor seemed quite resigned to an indefinite stop.

Twelve o'clock at the earliest! He would walk to the next station and send the telegram.

"Better not leave," cautioned the conductor, to whom he mentioned his intention. "Never can tell; we may get out in a few minutes. Just got to jack the engine up and get the wheels on the rail."

When the dawn began to break in the sky they said they would have to wait for another engine. And Barnes started off down the tracks for the station. He would wire in Sam's name and his own, asking her for Heaven's sake to wait. A sickly light overspread the world as he got into the little station. He had to hunt up the agent, who had gone home to bed.

"Can't send any message," said the man when Barnes had stated his business. "Wires all down, telegraph and telephone."

"God!" cried Barnes.

The agent, who had appeared a little peevish over being roused so early in the morning, was arrested by the agony in the young man's voice.

"Somebody sick?" he quizzed.

"No, no! Is there any way to get out of here—some place where I could catch a train on another line to New York?"

"If you could get over to Lawrence you could catch the electric that runs into Kilgore and get No. 9 on the R. and G., due at eleven twenty."

"How far is it to Lawrence?"

"Fourteen miles."

"Is there a garage in town?"

"No. But old man Patterson has a car. He makes trips over. He runs the telephone system here."

It turned out, however, that old man Patterson could not leave town. He was line-man as well as manager, and it was utterly impossible for him to leave with the service disrupted. Nor could anybody else in town run a car.

Finally, in desperation, Barnes got a man with a horse-rig who would take him over to Lawrence. After the usual delays of the small town, where a short trip is a journey, they started.

The roads were fearful. The buggy-wheels sank into the soft mud, and the mare's flanks showed the strain of pulling her own feet out of her tracks as well as the load behind her.

They reached Lawrence after an eternity and drove directly to the electric trolley station. A train was just ready to pull out. Barnes caught the hind end of the last car as it moved off, went inside, and tried to read to compose himself. It was impossible.

He missed No. 9 in Kilgore by one minute, and was told that he would have to wait for No. 15, which was due at three fifty-five. This would arrive in Jersey at 10.23 P.M.

Here, too, thanks to the storm, the wires were down, and to send a telegram was out of the question. He found a man with a big roadster who was willing to make the drive at top speed for a hundred dollars. He was a skilled driver who had been in several notable races as mechanic, and he gloried in racing against time.

"I'll make it a hundred and fifty if you can get me into New York in five hours," said Barnes.

"Can I?" cried the driver. "Say, this old boat can run rings around anything ever put behind a radiator."

They were barely in place in the bucket seats of the car when the motor began to pop. There was a sickening skid over the wet street, a lunge and a roar. Somebody screamed; then Barnes felt the car take the gas, the clutch dropped in and they rolled away. A quick change from first to second and the car shot off, slid down a grade just out of town, and stretched her nose out on the long, smooth road. The driver eased the throttle open, and the car responded with a steadily increasing noise. The odor of castor oil became more noticeable. Another quarter-inch down-pull on the throttle and the explosions settled into a roar.

Almost before Barnes had settled himself the next town loomed into view, and thereafter towns flashed by with something of the effect of the passing telegraph-poles of the preceding days. At each one there would be a sudden reduction of the terrific speed, a circumspect run of a few minutes with a

wailing of the siren-horn; then away once more.

Now and again they would stop for gasoline or water. All along the road were signs of the storm. Sometimes they were forced to go more slowly by the condition of the highways. At such times Barnes had an insane desire to get out and push the car over the bad places.

And then would appear that most tragic of all signs to the man in an automobile:

#### Best Temporary Road

And they would detour over ridgy fields and through sticky mud.

After a while they struck the public highway, and the young man at the wheel let the big car out with a roar that thrilled the tense man beside him. There was a cry in the driver's racing-blood for speed and more speed, and he gave himself over to the orgy of it.

They quit talking, quit thinking as the big car ate up the miles.

Once only a motor-cop caught them. The driver told him that the doctor was racing to beat death to New York, where his mother was very low, and the officer accepted the ten dollars Barnes gave him and nodded assent for them to go on.

Neither of them thought of food. Once they stopped for a change of tires, which the young man made with the expertness of a racing mechanic, with whom an extra second may mean a lost race.

Suddenly the roar of the car changed to a stuttering cough. The motor had chewed up a handful of valves.

The driver was out before they had come to a full stop.

"Get those valves out of my tool-box," he called to Barnes. He was already half under the hood.

In a time incredible to one who has paid by the hour for having a spark-plug changed or new valves put in, the two men were again on the road.

Then the car began to stop every few miles for a fit of sputtering and coughing. The driver would work frantically as though a great race were at stake. Barnes meanwhile sat grim-faced, or acted as helper.

Two miles out of a little flag-station the end was reached. The car coughed once, then settled down to peace. The crank-case was split through the center. A warm stream of oil dropped out, and with a last dying effort she shoved the end of a connecting-rod through the already shattered case.

"She's done," remarked the driver, with the racing man's quiet acceptance of the defeat he has fought like a demon.

Without a word Barnes turned toward the flag-station with its few houses looming in the distance. The driver wasted no time on the hopeless car. One look had told him that he could do nothing but walk in and get help. They tramped together in silence.

"Here," Barnes said when they found that nobody in town had a car that could be hired, "you did your best." He handed the driver the hundred and fifty dollars.

"Give me the hundred," said the man. "I didn't get you in."

"You wrecked your car trying to," replied Barnes. "I hope that covers the damages."

The driver found some one to help him out, and Barnes settled down to wait for the train. There was no telegraph-station.

It was after three o'clock. He was still two hours from New York by fast mail—and the fast mail would not stop.

All hope was gone. He had lost. They were perhaps already married. Certainly they would be before the crawling local on which he must travel would get into Jersey.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE STRIPPED SELF.

AUGUST 31. The date flashed into Esther's mind as her eyes opened. To-morrow was her wedding day! All night long the thought had been prodding, half waking her. Now, at dawn, it jerked her conscious mind into action. She did not hurry out of bed, but lay there staring at the gray wall of the tall building across the street, with its smoky, lifeless eyes.

What was the thing she wanted to think about? Oh, yes, her wedding day. To-morrow she would marry. Paul! Somehow



she had not believed it would happen. Nobody was happy—nobody true. Deep down in the souls of them, all men have a secret chamber where the true self is hid—the unlovely, stripped self, locked away from the world's eyes; mayhap locked away from that other self whose true name is bluff.

As for Philip, he had locked a door since his marriage. He seemed very much his old self, thoughtful and frivolous by turns; but hiding—always hiding. She knew.

Esther had not seen Aline again. She had wanted to talk to Philip—to sympathize with him; yet, how could she?

She rose languidly. Suddenly she felt tired—old. Mechanically, assisted by her French maid, she went through the process of dressing.

During breakfast the telephone rang. Clotilde answered.

"M. Paul," the maid told her.

Esther went slowly to the phone.

"Good morning, Paul."

"Good morning, dear! To-morrow!" he whispered.

There was a note of ineffable joy in his voice.

"To-morrow," she repeated. "It doesn't seem as if it can be true."

"Beauty is always true," he answered gladly.

The day was over. The last hairpin, the last bit of ribbon, the last paper of pins had been bought. All the packages had been delivered. The two larger trunks and the hat trunk were locked and ready for the transfer people. Even the wedding-gown had come in promptly as promised at six thirty. Esther and Clotilde, the maid, eagerly tore away the many layers of tinted tissue.

"Oh, Clotilde!" Esther cried. What woman can resist the beauty of the wedding-gown, even when the wrong man is master mechanic at the wedding?

Paul had insisted on a white gown. Their wedding was to be a simple ceremony in Esther's apartments, with only a few of the artist's most intimate friends. Esther had asked Ma Frank to come, and the solemn Lillie.

Together the two women took the filmy,

fragile thing out of its box. The French girl was in raptures. Esther's eyes danced, flashing blue-green, golden. She ran to the mirror, Clotilde after her, holding to the slight train to keep it from dragging.

"Oh, it's a dream, Clotilde!" Esther held it up against herself.

"Eet iss two dream! T'ree! Un-un—oh, *je ne sais pas le nombre en anglais*," Clotilde exclaimed, after floundering for a big English number. "*Il-y-a cent*—"

"Yes, a hundred dreams! Oh, oh! Is it a gown for a woman or a mantle for an angel?"

"For you, ze petite angel of M. Paul!"

An automobile-horn sounded under the window.

"Oh, there's his car now! Hurry, Clotilde! Put it away and help me dress. Run to the window, tell him I'll be down in five minutes. I'll try the gown on when I get home to-night!"

To-night! How bravely we say: To-night—to-morrow—I will do this or that! Vainglorious egotists! Ants under life's feet!

Esther's soul cringed within her as she felt the warmth of Paul's arm against her in the car. Suddenly it came over her that she could not—*could not* do this thing. And yet she must. Yes, she must go through with it. She could not turn back, because there was nowhere to turn. She was going to be married to one of her best friends. It seemed like marrying one of her kin—almost indecent. And to live with him as his wife! The full horror of it laid hold of her. It sickened her—made her faint and dizzy.

Her mind was in a daze all through dinner. It was past time for Sam's train from the West to get in. He had not got her message. Even if he came in on the morning train of the following day it would be too late. She was to be married at ten o'clock.

And the worst of it was that she didn't know whether she hoped he would get there or not. After sending the telegram she had suddenly thought of how he might misconstrue it. She dared not think of this even. Dear old Sam! And poor Paul!

A quiet little breakfast with Ma and

Lillie and Philip for guests had been planned, and by noon Paul's yacht, the Lotus, would be bearing them away.

"Paul, please don't come up this evening," Esther said when, after dinner, they stopped before her hotel. She had insisted on his bringing her home immediately. "I want to be alone this last evening."

Paul, tender and considerate as always, left her at the elevator.

Clotilde was all excitement when Esther got in.

"The telephone-bell he have ring so much!" she exclaimed rapidly. "All the time the voice of men; but they would not for you leave one message. And six men have come asking to see you since you have gone out. I have said you would return at eleven and a half, or midnight."

Esther felt vaguely curious, but she was too deep in her immediate future to give much thought to anything else. Hardly had she removed her things when there came a knock on her door and Clotilde admitted Philip.

"I know it's against the rule," he said in his blithe way. "Whose rule? I don't know. But I felt that I must come up and have one last little chat with Esther Bowles—my child." Esther invited him to sit down. She was touched by his visit.

"To-morrow you will be my friend's wife," he went on. "A grown-up lady and passed out of my ken. Remember, it was I who advised you to cast me out when I could be of no more use to you; but I refuse to be kicked out entirely before to-morrow."

Esther smiled in spite of the sickening heaviness that seemed fairly squeezing the breath out of her. All day she had waited for Sam.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" Philip was saying. "I never thought I could be so sentimental! I think it is because you interested me. I never wearied of you."

"What a compliment!"

"It's true. You have a mind that never lagged in stupidity behind me. I always counted on you for refreshment of outlook, and got it.

"Did you give yourself a gambler's chance?" he asked seriously after a while.

"Yes, and lost."

"Well, be a good sport and abide by the consequence," he said.

"I will. Philip, I was impressed by what you said, 'Success is just happiness.' Most folks think success means gratified ambition."

"There is no such thing," Philip replied. "Ambition is a thirst that can never be slaked—for the moment you have finished one draft you have need of another."

Before she could reply the telephone rang insistently.

"Maybe I'll find out who has been calling me ever since I went out," said Esther, going to the phone.

It was a message to say that Ma Frank was sick, and asking Esther to come at once. Startled and worried, the girl lost no time in doing so, and Philip took her over in his car. As she got out he caught her hand in a long, firm grasp and said:

"Good-by, *my child!*"

To Esther's surprise, there was no doctor in attendance on Ma. Nor was Lillie even there. The old woman made a great show of being very sick, but would not permit Esther to call a doctor or leave her bedside. Nor was any one else permitted to come in. Esther had a curious feeling that Ma was not sick at all. At two o'clock the old woman urged her to go to bed in her old room, saying she would have her called early next morning.

Esther was awakened the following morning by the sound of Ma Frank's voice in the upper hall.

She jumped out of bed with a start. Her wedding day! She must dress and get over to the Dunston at once. Sam had not come! She looked at the clock—it struck seven. Three more hours!

"My goodness gracious!" cried Ma. "If here ain't that man with all them devil's books of his."

Philip Grenville, mounting the narrow steps with a white, strained face, looked behind him expecting to see a book-agent. He turned to the irate woman in surprise. She was standing at the head of the steps, her red hair frowzled, her flowered kimono pulled tight about her fat hips.



"Which with me a tellin' my Lillie not to open her mouth to nobody, and her never bein' a cacklin' hen nohow, I do believe the man's a witch, or anyways in cahoots with the Old Boy hisself, and don't need nobody to tell him where folks is." She set her free arm akimbo at her side.

Philip's astonishment was too profound for words. He stopped on the top step and stared at the enormous female blocking his way and talking to some one unseen by him.

"Which, if I had my way," she went on, "they'd burn witches to-day same as they used to. What with him a makin' my legs and my insides fly into their right places without a hitch."

Philip decided that perhaps Ma Frank was mildly insane. He had talked with her once while waiting for Esther to come in, but had merely thought her amusingly eccentric.

He called back down the stairs to Anesthesia, who had sent him up. "Which door do you say?"

"Sir?"

He repeated his question.

"Straight befo' yo' face, top of stairs, second floo', front parlor," she screeched in some irritation.

"Man, be you blind?" raged Ma, "that you go callin' down to Anesthesia and me a standin' right in front of you, and me that big I can hardly get up them narrow stairs, which salts baths ain't no good at all?"

"I was looking for Miss Bowles," Philip gasped, almost timidly.

"Which don't you suppose I know it, or you must 'a' put my brains into my stomach, or maybe so into my feet. An' you oughter be ashamed to do it."

"My dear Mrs. Frank—" Philip began.

"Which don't you 'dear' me, I bein' a Christian woman and never havin' no dealin's with Satan, nor none of his witches. I don't believe in witches."

Philip was profoundly disturbed. But nothing could overbalance his innate courtesy.

"Pardon me," he said. "I know it will be disappointing, but if you think I'm a witch, you are mistaken. I shouldn't know how to be a witch."

"What with givin' her the 'Devil's

Riddle' to read—oh, I saw it in her rooms at the Dunston, and telling her God ain't God, but He's force, a flingin' arms and legs onto people and insides into 'em and getting 'em all into their right places same as God could, Him not being needed to do it."

Light dawned in Philip's mind; she was not crazy after all. He tried to break in on her, but he might as well have tried to dam a swollen river.

"Which it's the evil eye I do believe you've got, a bringin' bad luck to everybody you come around." Her voice rose furiously above her protestations. "Bad luck to your wife that you just married, and bad luck to your friend, and bad luck to the poor little girl to be married to-day, and you talkin' as if there wasn't such a thing in the world as trouble."

Her straggly red hair worked loose from all its pins. She lost her hold on her kimonos several times. She was rage and comedy combined and personified. But her words sobered Philip.

"Mrs. Frank," he broke in urgently, "that is why I came to see Miss Bowles. I feel that I have done her a great injury without intending it. I am her friend, and I have wanted only to help her. I'm overwhelmed by this thing. I—"

"Well, seeing you acknowledge you done her wrong—" Ma hesitated, pondered a minute. "How'd you find out she was here?" she asked suspiciously.

"I brought her over last night, and findin' she had not gone home, I thought she must be here."

Ma sniffed, then turned away as Philip mounted the stair.

Greatly astonished at Philip's early call, Esther had dressed hastily and opened the door for him.

He greeted her by holding out the morning paper. He was silent—his face was white and drawn.

Standing in the door of her old room, with Philip and Ma just outside, Esther took the paper Philip extended. A curious foreboding laid hold of her. The six men whom Clotilde said had tried to see her, the phone calls, Ma's subterfuge, all raced through her mind.

And then she read the hideous thing. The head-lines fairly shrieked:

**DIVORCE AND DAMAGE SUITS. SAME DEFENDANT!**

**Bride of Millionaire and Actress Start Actions Together—Favorite Model of Noted Artist Named in Both.**

Esther reeled and clutched at the door-jamb for support. Instantly Ma Frank caught her in capable arms and set her gently on the bed. Pushing aside the glass of water Philip poured from a carafe on the table, Esther held up the newspaper again. Into what new depths of humiliation had she been plunged?

Naming Miss Esther Bowles, artist's model, suits for divorce in the case of Aline Grenville, bride of six months of Philip Grenville, the millionaire clubman, and for alienation of affections by Belle Benton, affianced wife of Burton Davis, a theatrical manager, were filed yesterday.

Mrs. Grenville claims that her husband visited Miss Bowles as late as last evening, after the suit had been filed, at her home in the Dunston. Miss Benton in her complaint charges that she discovered her affianced husband on the fire-escape of a room occupied by Miss Bowles at a theatrical rooming-house. It is understood that Miss Bowles was to have married Paul Evers, the well-known painter, whose favorite model she is, this morning.

An interview with Aline followed, in which she told of having pretended to go on a visit to her parents on the morning of the previous day, and being taken to the station by her husband. She had got off at the first station and returned, employed detectives, and had him followed. In the afternoon she had filed suit, but had kept the detectives on her husband's trail. She had thus learned that Grenville had gone to Miss Bowles's apartment again in the evening. She did not know how long he had stayed.

Next came an even more damning statement from Belle Benton, who was described as a sweet, middle-aged woman who, for fifteen years, had been engaged to Davis, giving up her youth in waiting for him to marry her, which she claimed he had promised to do as soon as he was financially

able. She outlined the scene in Esther's room in detail.

The article continued with biographies of the parties in the "latest divorce scandal," that of Esther being cautiously worded, but highly colored. It ended with the statement that repeated efforts to get into touch with Miss Bowles had been unavailing.

Esther read the story to the last word. Her arms dropped and the paper slipped from her fingers. She stared agonizedly at Ma and Philip.

The clock struck seven thirty. The girl jumped. The man lifted his head.

"It's damnable!" he cried. "I had no faintest hint of it till this morning. My God, Esther! To think I could have brought such a thing to my two best friends! I thought of my happiness first, my friends second, and the world not at all! And here is the result. Come, let's go to Paul's at once."

"Man, be you crazy?" shouted Ma. "Her go with *you*?"

"No; I forgot," he replied humbly.

Esther took a taxi and went alone, leaving Ma fairly pushing Philip out, the while she declared he had the evil eye, and commanded him not to look at her.

Esther found Paul in the studio reading the story. He looked up vaguely.

"Esther," his voice sounded strange to her, "was Philip—in your rooms—last—night?" It seemed as if he could hardly speak.

She nodded silently.

"You wouldn't let me go up."

She wanted to tell him that she had not known Philip was coming up. She opened her mouth, but no sound came.

"You—didn't—let me," he repeated.

She shook her head dumbly.

He stared at the carpet. "Asked me—not to—come in. Said you wanted to be—alone." He paused as if unable to go on. Then: "You—know—this—Davis?" He stared dully at her.

She nodded again.

"In his—company?" His eyes dropped. He did not look at her this time.

She cleared her throat, swallowed hard twice before the word came. "Yes," she croaked.



The man fell silent again.

"This story — fire-escape — a lie," he stated, his eyes darting from side to side.

Again she struggled for speech.

"No," she gasped out. "I can explain."

He glared at her as if his mind had gone blank, and passed his hand back over his head two or three times in rapid succession.

"He came to—see me about—" What had he come to see her about? To offer her a job? No. She couldn't tell Paul that. What then? There was no explanation that one could make—that anybody would believe, especially anybody outside of theatrics. "Just to see me," the girl finished. "She came—he got scared." This was no explanation. It merely corroborated what the papers said. Her mind wouldn't work.

Paul's face took on a look of horror. He got up and went over to the fireplace. Esther watched him curiously. He laid his head on the mantel.

Tearing sobs began to shake him. Slowly, as one in sleep, she felt her way over to him. She stood a minute uncertain, then fumbled off her gloves; looked curiously at her engagement ring as if she had not seen it before. He lifted his head. She slipped the ring off and held it out to him. He made no move to take it. She laid it on the mantel. He stared at it an instant—then flung it into the fire.

Without a word the girl went out. The man stood still and watched her indifferently.

As she reached the street he overtook her.

"Come back," he whispered hoarsely. "I want you. I don't care. The yacht is waiting. We'll go aboard to-night."

"Go away," she droned, just as she had said it to Burt that night when he came to her dressing-room after Dr. Barnes had gone out the stage door.

"Come back, darling! I'm mad for you. I—oh—I can't live without you!" The passion of his voice rose.

"Go away," she repeated dully.

He tried to take her hand; to put his arm around her. She set her small hand against his breast and tried to push him from her.

"Come, get into the car. We'll drive—I'll—take you home."

She made a motion to a passing taxi. It stopped and she got in. Paul tried to follow her.

"Go away!" she gasped.

"Can't let you in, sir, if the lady don't want you," growled the burly driver. He pushed Paul away, slammed the door, and climbed to his seat.

The artist stood on the curb as they drove away. He watched her go with the idle look of one who sees a thousand passers-by. His car was standing at the curb. Why was it there so early? His mind had stopped. It was like a clock whose pendulum was held tight. Why? Oh, yes, his wedding day! But something had happened. It came back to him—that story! And she had gone. He had let her get away without killing her!

He started his engine and drove to the Dunston.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### "WHAT I WANT I TAKE."

ON being told that Esther had not come in, Paul turned from the Dunston in a sort of daze. Exactly what he intended doing he had no definite idea. The one thought in his mind, the one urge, was to find her—*find her!* He tried to think out the thing that had happened. He could not. He drove around the block and went back to her hotel.

"Is Miss Bowles in yet?"

Lillie Frank Dunston showed melancholy surprise.

"Not yet," she answered, glancing at the clock. Vaguely Paul recalled that he had seen that clock before. It had pointed 8.50; it was now nine. He realized that he was making himself and Esther conspicuous. He went for a long drive, slipping slowly along the streets. Not that he was thinking—he was too dazed for that. He was simply waiting for Esther.

He watched the street clocks. The minutes were hours. But he held himself in check. He went resolutely away from the hotel. At 9.30 he got out and phoned from

a drug-store and again at 10.30. Their wedding hour had passed. His mind registered it vaguely.

Why was she not in? It was strange; but he would wait until eleven. That would give her plenty of time. Perhaps she had gone for a drive. That was it! She had gone for a drive, just as he had done. It did not occur to him that he was driving merely because he knew not what else to do.

He went back to the studio and ran into a mob of reporters. They began plying him with questions. He got away from them somehow.

Henry had his breakfast all ready. The sight of it sickened him. He began searching in a drawer in a sort of puzzled way—then he found what he wanted and slipped it into his outside coat-pocket with a curious stealthy gesture of which he was unconscious. It sagged his coat a little.

He got Mrs. Dunston on the phone. Had Miss Bowles come in yet? She had not. He went out. Again the reporters fell on him. They followed to his car. One even stepped on the running-board. Paul pushed him off and gave gas to his engine. He turned toward Yonkers. Every little while he would stop and phone the Dunston. After a time he gave up. He would find her at seven in the evening. He always had. It was their dinner hour.

No doubt of the story came to him. She had admitted it. Philip had known about this man. He recollected hearing Philip call to her one day from the paper he was reading: "I see that Davis is to have the No. 4 'Missing Man Company.'" "That's good," Esther had answered, "I'm glad he has something better. Poor, good old Burt. I feel like crying every time I think of him and that horrible 'bell-cow' of his."

They had both laughed. Paul had been at work at the time and had given no heed to the words. Now they came back to him. What an odd thing the human mind is! How curious that it should pigeonhole trifling sights and sounds; then hand them to us at exactly the psychological moment.

Bell-cow! She must have meant his wife—Belle—Belle—what was it? Benton;

Belle Benton! and Burt Davis. Burt and Belle. He had an odd notion that he had heard the two names some other where than in the studio. They had been brought to his notice in some unpleasant way before that. Ah! Bectan's! Esther's table! How well he recalled Esther's face. Even some of the big woman's words came to him: "I'm tired of seeing other women wear good clothes and me never have none."

Br-r-r, what a scene! And that man! Esther! Sweet, dainty Esther! It was unthinkable. Then there was that time he had gone up to her rooms with *matinée* tickets and had caught Davis crying—probably trying to get her to come back to him. Philip had taken her away from Davis. He had taken her and educated her. Made her a fit wife for himself. *Why had he not married her?*

The double standard! He could not give his name to another man's—Perhaps that was the explanation of Philip's sudden marriage. He could not take her for his wife, and he dared not go on. He had been afraid of himself! Had married for protection! He had tried to break with her. Then he, Paul Evers, had asked her to come to him. Her price to him had been marriage. And Philip had come back. Philip, his best-loved friend! This he could not forgive.

Perhaps she had gone to him—was with him now.

The Lotus was on the river, waiting for himself and Esther. Waiting to take them away on their honeymoon. He had called it their harmony moon—the time when all life crashes into one grand, harmonious chord. Now the instrument was broken—out of tune. Beauty had played him a sorry trick. She had been within his grasp and had run away—gone to Philip.

Philip had been more right than he. Not harmony, but force ruled, and pushed us along, or broke us, as its plan had need.

Wave on wave of memories surged back and rent his soul. Philip in the studio reading, idling; gay or bored by turns. Then he had taken Esther—the one woman for him! Oh, why—why had he, Paul, let her go? Had he not said it would



be more harmonious to die with her than to live without her?

He turned back toward town. He was tired and mud-splashed, and with a multitude of whirling thoughts—in which one only was clear: he must find Esther—and take her. The Lotus was waiting for them.

The one thing that he could not conceive of was that he, Paul Evers, could *want and not have*.

Never in all the years of his life had he wanted a thing that he could not take. As a boy—and as a man.

Slowly he came back into town. A few who knew him by sight and had seen the papers, stared curiously. He did not see them. At 6.30 he again went to the Dunston. She had not been in.

Paul felt that he must soon awake and find this all a horrid dream. He could not endure it much longer. He spoke to Mrs. Dunston. Yes, Miss Bowles had left the hotel. She had not said where she was going. That was all. The woman turned away.

"Where was Miss Bowles's maid?" he asked.

Gone. Dismissed.

"By whom?"

"Miss Bowles's orders."

"And Miss Bowles's things?"

"Gone. Everything gone."

"Did she move out to-day?" he asked vaguely.

"So it would seem." The woman turned gravely to her desk. He was dismissed. Paul searched the solemn, inscrutable face; but got no help from it. He turned away. Where was she? That owl-eyed woman knew. Who was it that had given orders to dismiss Esther's maid and for the disposal of her things? Whom did Esther know beside the people of the Royal Rover Company, who were now scattered, and for whom she had never cared? There were many people whom she knew—artists, actors, writers, and society people; but only in a casual and indifferent way. They had courted, flattered her; but he and Philip had been her only friends. To whom then would she go?

Philip!

Fool that he was not to have thought of

it! They were together. No matter—he would find them—together—and take her!

Philip, meantime, had been searching the city for Paul. He was prostrated over the catastrophe; but determined to seek no rest till he had set things right. That he had figured in the wrecking of his two best friends' lives was a horror too great for words, and not at all in accord with the eternal justice in which he believed in spite of his grim acceptance of force as the ruler of life.

He was so wretched in his sympathy for her and Paul. Not once did he think of himself.

That Paul might believe the story about himself was the one thing he never considered. He wanted to find and convince him that the story about Burt was as absurd as the one about himself.

He went up to see Esther again in the afternoon. She had returned in a daze to the warm welcome of Ma Frank.

"I meant only good for you," he cried, "and yet for my own pleasure I sacrificed you! I swear I did not think of it. That's no excuse; but I will make it up to you, Esther, in any way I can. I'd cut my right hand off now to undo it. You believe me—don't you, *chérie*?"

And then he spoke for his friend.

"Poor old Paul! I must see him now. He greatly loves you, Esther. He perhaps said or did some mad thing. We are like that when we are in love. It is only when we are out of love that we say and do the sane things. He is sensitive. It is an ugly mess. Then, none of us is free from the demon of jealousy. Yes, I must see him at once. I must make it right with him. Meantime, you are not to worry, *bien-aimée*."

And all the time, horrible as it was, Esther was glad! Glad! She was free! At a big price, perhaps; but men fought and died for freedom, while their families went hungry and cold. It was worth a big price, was freedom.

She told Philip about it and asked him not to seek Paul for her. The man stared at her, helpless and bewildered—then he offered her his last sacrifice to friendship.

"Aline is getting her divorce," he said in a hesitant way new to his impulsive tongue and rapid, passionate speech. "I will be adrift, little Esther, with too much money and nothing to do with it—you started out to find all the worthless things that my money can buy—we are friends, chums; we never jar on each other—I would be very proud of you as my wife. We could live abroad. I have sacrificed you. Let me make it up to you with my sincere friendship and admiration; also with what my money can do. What you say, *chérie*?"

How splendidly he had put it! As though all compliment and sacrifice would be on her side.

Esther had not once interrupted his long speech. She was too full for words. Now she caught his hand in a passionate clasp, pressed it impulsively to her cheek, and then motioned for him to leave her alone. He understood, and went out again in search of Paul, who was at that moment searching for him.

Everywhere Paul went he found that Philip had been looking for him. He did not know what to make of it. Evidently Esther was not with him. Then where was she?

Like a flash it came to him—Mrs. Frank!

He turned his car at once. Ma met him in the lower hall. Much as she had come to oppose Esther's marriage to the artist, she now greeted him with open arms. Without question she directed him to the girl's room.

"Come in," said Esther's voice in response to his knock. "Paul!" she exclaimed, as he entered, closing the door behind him.

"Oh, my darling!" he cried. "I have come for you!"

"Paul, I can't marry you," she told him. "I can't."

He looked at her a moment in a curious, intent way.

"You *must* come with me, Esther," he said. "We are going on a long cruise together. We are out of tune with beauty. We must have new strings."

Something in his eyes, in his hushed

voice, and his words laid a cold hand on Esther's heart.

"What do you mean, Paul?" she asked, fear clutching her.

"Why, don't you see, dear, we are cast out? Shamed and disgraced! Is it not more beautiful to step out than to go on in a world that has become unbeautiful? I wish I might have painted my great picture; but it is as well—my great picture would have been a lie. There is no beauty here. I have learned the truth. I could never paint again. There is nothing to interpret. I have no wish to go on, and I can't leave you here, my darling, to face alone a life that is hideous."

"You weakling!" Esther cried, anger now mastering her fear. "You poor bab-bler, crowing over life while the sun shines and then squawking in terror at the first sign of storm! So that's all there is to you—a bubble of theory to be scattered by a breath! A coward who struts on the drill ground and runs at the first sound of artillery! I'm glad I escaped you! Glad! Glad! It's worth the price twice over. Shame and disgrace? I can face them, and gladly! But the one thing I couldn't face, now that I know you, is life with a weakling!"

Paul stared at her in amazement. This was the first time he had ever seen her angry. Dimly the beauty of her in a towering rage caught the senses of the artist in him. A vagrant thought came to him that he must paint her like this.

He started toward her, opened his mouth to speak; she would not let him.

"Don't come near me!" she cried, in the wild fury of her volcanic nature now let loose. "Such a friend! A traitor to Philip—unworthy of his big, fine love—unworthy of the faith I had in you, and unworthy of the life God has given you!"

The more she talked the angrier she got. The cumulative action of the past months, topped by this blow of Aline's and Belle's, had left her weak with the pain of it; but rejoicing; like a woman who has at great suffering been delivered of her child and is faint and sick—but rejoicing. Then had come this man who had seemed so strong and fine in fair weather, and was but a



useless craft going instantly to pieces in foul!

She rose up in righteous wrath, in defense of her young child—freedom!

"You are utterly mad!" she stormed.

"Yes, mad for love of you," he said calmly. "Mad! Mad! My beautiful Esther!" His voice began rising. "I want you as I never wanted anything in my life before, and what I want I take! It is the law of beauty."

Before she could realize what was happening she was in his arms; his lips were on hers. She struggled, tried to cry out, but could not. He crushed her to him. She felt as though he were breaking every bone in her body. She tried to turn her face so as to get a breath, but could not.

His face pressed tight against her nostrils, shut off her breath completely. She was smothering and unable to move. He drew her tighter. His arms were a vise slowly closing on her, and that soon would break her. The room swam. She heard voices in the hall just outside her door. She could not distinguish them for the rush of blood in her ears, that hurt so. She tried to make some sound that somebody would hear, by stamping on the floor. She felt herself lifted. There was a terrific noise as of some one hammering against her ear-drums. Then everything went black.

## CHAPTER XL.

AT 3 A.M.

**I**F there be a hell wherein the soul must writhe and bleed and burn in helpless, hopeless torture, Jim Barnes would have nothing to learn by going there. In a little village whose only acknowledgment of the fact that there were automobiles was a gas station announcing its business methods with a sign of "Free Air," the young surgeon got acquainted with the state of the eternally damned. And he learned that one of its most hideous features is man's realization of his own absolute impotence—his complete helplessness to undo what is done and his entire hopelessness for the future.

There was no hope anywhere—nothing to do but wait!

And he waited.

He got acquainted with that village from every angle but that of hope. He watched two fast trains thunder by while he waved frantically to stop them.

After a million years or more had passed the local train crept in like a wounded snail that may fail while you look. Like the same feeble creature it crept out with a man on board who could cut and stitch life's finest, most delicate machinery, master man's most malignant ills, and drive off death as by magic; yet who could not stitch up one split crank-case, devise one automobile out of a gas station with free air and expensive gasoline, nor change one railroad time-table.

Stopped at every way station, bumped unevenly along, Barnes, almost a maniac, stood up as his train finally dragged into the Jersey station. The boat crept across the river. He could have swum over faster, he felt sure.

"Here's the number!" he shouted to a taxi-driver when he got out of the ferry station. He thrust the Dunston number into the man's hand and climbed into the car.

"Get me there as quickly as you can."

The solemn-eyed Lillie did not hesitate to tell him where Esther was when he told her he was a friend from Montana, and Sam had sent him.

At Ma Frank's he pushed a five-dollar bill into the taxi-driver's hand. "How much?" he asked, starting up the steps on a run.

"Four dollars," the driver said, appraising his excitement. The doctor was already ringing the bell. The driver hesitated, then followed him. "Change, sir?"

"Keep it—keep it."

The man turned.

"Wait, I may want you." He had a wild notion of going to the very altar for her.

Anesthesia opened the door.

"Is Miss Bowles here?"

"Sir?"

"Miss Bowles, Miss Bowles! Is she here?"

"Yes, sir," she whimpered, "she's upstairs."

"I want to see her."

"Sir?"

"*I want to see Miss Bowles!*"

Ma Frank's head came out of a room down the hall.

"My name is Barnes—Dr. Barnes; I came to see Miss Bowles, if—"

"Her doctor!" screamed Ma. "Go right up, doctor; second floor, front parlor—which Mr. Evers is up there now, an' I'm that glad you come I'm sick, which it's no wonder if she is sick with all she's been through this day—where on earth is my shoes?"

Dr. Barnes was already on the next landing. His heart seemed to pound louder than his knock on the door. Evers with her? So he had come too late. No matter, he had to see her and know for certain this time that she was actually married.

He knocked. There was no answer. He thought he heard a sound like the stamp of a foot on the floor inside the room. He knocked again. Still there was no answer. Ma was puffing up the stairs.

"Which why don't she answer?" Ma said. "She's there, an' Mr. Paul is with her. Sweetie!" she called.

Still there was no answer. By this time she had reached Esther's door; she opened it.

At a glance Barnes took in the scene—Esther in Paul Evers's arms. Well—what else had he looked for? Then the artist's head flashed around, and Barnes was galvanized into a white fury of hate—for Paul's was the face of a devil.

Even as the artist turned and leaped silently, murderously at the doctor, he flung the girl aside. She staggered back and fell on the divan, and the men grappled. Ma shut the door and ran to Esther, then almost stumbled into the adjoining room for water.

The men struggled fiercely, silently. Getting one hand free for an instant, Paul slipped it into his outside coat-pocket, and Barnes caught the gleam of a small automatic. As Paul's hand came out of his pocket, Esther, who had recovered almost instantly, started up.

Barnes grabbed Paul's wrist and turned the revolver slowly back in the artist's own face. With a sudden wrench of his arm, Paul twisted the ugly little barrel to one side. A shot rang out, and with a scream Esther fell, just as Ma Frank ran in.

Paul relaxed suddenly, letting go of the pistol, and stared uncertainly.

The doctor wheeled and ran at once to Esther. Without a moment's hesitation he picked her up, brushed Evers aside, and ran out of the room and down the stairs before the boarders woke up.

They had begun filling the halls, however, by the time Barnes reached the first floor. He fairly plowed his way through them and out to the street where the taxi still waited.

"The nearest hospital!" he shouted to the man, who sent the car forward with a jump.

Arriving at the hospital, Esther was taken at once to a ward. She was in collapse and had begun moaning piteously. Opiates were administered immediately to relieve her, and reduce the nervous shock.

A brief examination showed that the bullet had struck her in the right side below the last rib. Penetrating the liver, it had ricocheted out through the back just below the angle of the shoulder-blade.

"The patient is in decided shock," the attending surgeon said. "We must wait for reaction to see the extent of the damage."

"She doesn't seem in immediate danger," Barnes ventured in a thick voice. "If there are no internal hemorrhages—" He broke off.

The attending surgeon had recognized Dr. Barnes's name at once as the inventor of the operation which had made him famous. He looked pityingly at the grim-faced man who must know as well as himself, yet almost pleaded for hope.

With evident hesitation the old surgeon repeated Barnes's own words: "Yes, if there are no internal hemorrhages—her chances for recovery are good."

Such meager hope, and yet, all he could give—and Barnes knew it.

As a physician, he was permitted to stay right beside Esther's bed. And hour by



hour he waited, watching her every change of expression, listening to her faint, intermittent moans, taking her pulse, and directing the nurses who came in and went out.

Paul, aroused to a horrified realization of the thing he had come near to doing, and of the thing he had unintentionally done, took up again his interrupted drive. Worn out in body from the long, hard day, weak from hunger, sick in mind and heart, and unconscious of his physical discomfort, he drove at random, getting out from time to time to phone the hospital.

At three o'clock he was told that the patient was not holding her own very well, but would probably last through the night.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### WITH HESITANT FEET.

MISS MATTIE TRUMAN was pouring water into an ash-barrel that was set on a sloping board about two feet above the ground. She was watching with grim satisfaction the rich brown liquid that dripped into the bucket placed below it.

"That ash-wood do make sich good lye," she muttered. "Got 'bout enough for a pot o' soap. Reckon I'll make it to-morrow."

"Mornin', Miss Mattie," drawled a voice, and she turned to see Sam Tuttle coming around the corner of the house. "Here's a telegraph for you."

"My Lord! Who from?" Miss Mattie pulled her sleeves down quickly before taking the yellow envelope.

"Doc," Sam replied laconically. "I knowed hit was comin,' so I went over to town an' waited fur hit."

"He ain't hurt nor—"

"Naw. Better read it. Wants you to come down East," replied Sam, showing he had read it. It said:

Come at once, next train. Wiring hundred dollars. Take sleeper.

JIM.

"Land o' livin'!" exclaimed the woman, overcome by the demand. "He wants me to go clear to New York State."

"Said ketch the next train," Sam drawled. "He sent ten dollars for delivery of the telegram to wunst. I allow he didn't figger I'd be thar to git hit."

"I'll wait and fetch you back with me," Sam added. "Here's the hundred and ten dollars."

"My Lord! I can't leave thisaway, without notice! I ain't ready." She began slicking back her hair and looking helplessly at Sam.

"Then you ain't goin' back with me?" he suggested.

"Course I'm goin'," Miss Mattie snapped. She cupped her two hands at her mouth like a megaphone and turned her face toward a herd of cattle in the distance. "Jer-r-ee!" she called in a high, long wail.

"Yea—hoo-o!" came the answer from the direction of the herd.

"He'll take keer o' the cattle all right; but there's all that good lye an' that shoat jest ready to be kilt," she complained. "Come in, Sam, an' make yourself at home. I reckon it 'll be a right smart spell 'fore I'll be ready." She looked at the telegram. "Take a sleeper," she scoffed. "Now does that boy think I ain't got no better sense than to go clear off to New York State an' not fetch a nightgown?"

"He meant a sleepin' car," Sam volunteered.

"I ain't got one, an' I wouldn't know what to do with it if I had." She hustled into the house. Sam followed.

"You don't have to own one. You pay two dollars a night to sleep in one," he drawled.

"Me pay two dollars for a place to sleep one night? I'll set up all the way to New York State first!" she snapped. "I done it comin' up from Texas."

"I can't understand it," Miss Mattie muttered as she fairly flew about her preparations. "He told me plain—Sam, why haven't you never married?" she asked abruptly.

"Why haven't *you*, Miss Mattie?" Sam asked, tipping his chair back on its hind legs.

"Humph!" she snorted. "'Cause I didn't want to."

"Same here," Sam replied quietly.

The grim old woman eyed him keenly, then began busying herself with two large valises and a hat box.

"I'm goin' along East with you, Miss Mattie," Sam informed her after a while. She stopped short and stared at him.

"Goin' with me?" she snapped. "What for?"

"Two reasons. I don't like that telegraph. May not be nothin' wrong, but I'm goin' to see. If they ain't—well, they's a plumb nice woman in New York," he began. "I mean besides Esther," he qualified. "She's got eyes that sorter git inside o' you, and I thought I'd like to talk to her again."

"Well, talk about women," Miss Mattie said, "men do clean beat me!"

Coming out of the telephone booth at Times Square after receiving the message from the hospital, Paul climbed into his car and turned toward his apartment up-town.

Exactly what happened no one knew, but a policeman standing on the corner of One Hundred and Fifty-Third Street and Riverside Drive at 3.30 A.M. saw a car turn in from Broadway toward the Drive. As the machine reached the garage about midway the block it began to gather speed. Paralyzed, the officer watched it down the steep incline over rough stones and gravel that seemed to accelerate its speed.

As the big car reached the foot of the hill it swerved to the right as though it would turn into the fence surrounding a graveyard on that side; but it struck the curb, and the nose of the powerful engine righted toward the drive. Without another break the wild car dashed across the smooth asphalt and into the iron railing that protects the street from a drop of a hundred and fifty feet. The machine shot through the railing, taking a heavy cement post as it went; turned turtle in the air, and crashed into two motor-boats beached below.

Paul Evers's body was taken from the broad band of electric wires that run parallel with the tracks. There was not even a cut on him, showing that he had evidently stayed in the car until almost on the wires. He had not been killed by the fall, but by

an unprotected electric wire connected with one of the boat-houses for lighting purposes.

Beauty, failing him in life, had been kind in death. She had put no blemish on the esthetic face, nor scarred the fine, slim form she had given him.

Whether his brakes had refused to work, or, occupied with other thoughts, Evers had not noticed the incline, none knew. Philip had vague misgivings, but he never gave voice to them. Sadly he took one of his best loved friends to Boston, there to lay him beside his fathers, while the other stood with hesitant feet on the threshold of the great divide.

"Between life and death—Barnes and Paul!" Philip murmured as the train thundered along with its living and its dead. "I wonder which of them will win."

Staring out into the blackness of the night, he seemed to see a great door in which stood a young girl, laughing. And inside the door stood Paul in a mist, more spiritual than ever, and a great beauty surrounded him; on the outside stood Barnes, big and virile. And storms and darkness lay around him.

And each of them held out his hand to her, and she gave one of her hands to each of them. She looked at the men, and beyond them, and she laughed as she looked, then swayed toward—

Philip drew himself up with a grim exclamation. "Am I turning fool or poet?" he muttered. "Never knew I had such an imagination."

But the picture he had conjured stayed with him, and haunted him. And standing beside Paul's last home on earth, he caught himself whispering: "Which?"

What a mess he had made of life! It came to him that there was something missing from his philosophy that had led to such results. For he held himself responsible.

With all the strength, yet without any of the fire of his nature, he loved her. It was the deep affection that often exists between man and woman toward the end of a long life together—when the flame is dead, but something bigger and finer is there.

A report had been made by the hospital.



to police headquarters, and Barnes had answered the necessary questions. The shooting had been accidental. He and Paul Evers had been scuffling over the gun when it went off and shot Miss Bowles.

Ma Frank had corroborated Barnes's statement. Paul's valet identified the gun that Barnes wrenched from Evers's loosened grasp as the shot was fired.

The papers made a big story of the accidental shooting of Miss Bowles, the tragic death of Evers, and the withdrawal of Mrs. Grenville's divorce suit. Miss Bowles was in a critical condition. The attending surgeon was very hesitant in his prognosis. It was believed she would not last the week out. The prominence of all parties concerned, not excepting the young surgeon who sat without sleep, almost without nourishment, beside Miss Bowles's bedside, kept the story running.

For the next three days her condition took alternate turns for better and worse.

Barnes had not looked at a paper; knew nothing of the circumstances of Esther's broken engagement—just that it had been broken. He learned this from Ma, who stated just that and no more.

Philip, back from Boston, came and went like a spirit of unrest. On learning that his wife had withdrawn her divorce suit he smiled. And it was the smile of the executioner for Aline Potts Grenville, murderer of one, perhaps two, of his friends. Without a moment's hesitation he went out, climbed into his car, and proceeded to his lawyers. He was closeted with them for a long time, in which a stormy scene was enacted; but he emerged triumphant.

Mama Potts, who, on arriving in New York, had been the cause of her daughter's withdrawal of suit with a view to a reconciliation, made no effort in that direction when she learned the result of Philip's interview with his lawyers, but she told her daughter exactly what her temper and vindictiveness had done for her pretty little person.

"You've thrown away a fortune, an enviable social position; descended to the level of a common actress, made yourself the laughing stock of New York (for even the papers have contained veiled hints of

collusion); turned the tide of sympathy toward the woman you failed to ruin, for Dr. Barnes will marry her if she lives, and you are not a widow, not a wife, and must go back to Elvira to receive the condolences of narrow-minded folks who envied your high flight, and will rejoice secretly at your downfall," said Mrs. Potts with grim force. "And you can sit home evenings in our stuffy little living-room and knit—and grow old. You can't join the mothers' club because you are not a mother; you can't belong to the young folks' social circle because you will be that object of scorn in a small town—a 'grass-widow'! You may be permitted to work for the Ladies' Aid perhaps; and if you ever get a divorce, where you once could have picked the best of Elvira's eligibles, you will then be glad to be picked by the worst."

Aline had stared at her mother all through this long speech, the horror of what she had done growing on her as Mrs. Potts hit nail after nail on the head in her characteristic way. And each nail, this time, was driven in Aline's coffin, as that young woman was clever enough to see.

Strangely she did not go into hysteria, as was her wont when unpleasant winds blew upon her, but sat silent, blinking at her mother.

"Well, I won't do it!" she said at last, rising with a bitter little laugh. "I'll go to France to ladle soup."

On the sixth day after Esther had been shot, word was given to her friends that a crisis was expected. If there were no rise in temperature in the next forty-eight hours all danger would be past.

Ma sat as usual in the anteroom. Sam and Miss Mattie now sat with her. All were silent. Miss Mattie was grim and upright, Ma sagging in her chair. Nurses went noiselessly, on rubber heels, back and forth along the halls, or came into the room and went out—always non-committal and mysterious.

Barnes, gray-faced, hollow-eyed, with set jaw and compressed lips, sat grimly beside Esther's bed as though he would hold her to life by sheer physical force. Philip, coming in now and again, could not banish from

his mind the curious picture his fancy had drawn of Esther in the doorway—the two men, each calling, holding on to her, swaying her now this way and now that. Which was stronger—the call of the spirit or of the flesh?

Maida, playing in stock in Brooklyn, with little time for reading the papers between playing one bill and studying and rehearsing another, finally heard of Esther's tragedy.

She had not yet hunted her friend up because her vanity was biding its time. She went over between the afternoon and the night performances.

Barnes looked up as she entered Esther's ward. She looked at him, but no word of greeting passed between them. She had changed unbelievably in the few weeks that had passed. Her dark hair, worn in short curls; her eyes luminous, and her face rapidly filling out, she seemed almost a different person. Though still very thin, she now looked slim instead of emaciated. And to the grim, silent man by that bedside she owed this great debt. Yet she had no greeting for him—he had none for her.

There are moments in life so big that we forget the trivialities. Then words that are but pebbles skimming the flat surface of life drop out of sight in the big waves.

Maida went to Esther and bent over her, looking long into the flushed face that turned restlessly on her pillow. The woman had no need to ask of her condition. Barnes's agonized eyes had told her. She bent low over the girl who had called her friend, and hot tears fell on the white counterpane. It was the second time Maida Ayers had cried in years.

Hands clasped tightly at her breast, she whispered:

"Come back, friend! Come back!"

Then suddenly she slipped to her knees, laid her head on the side of the little white bed, and her thin shoulders shook silently—heavily. Barnes put out his hand and laid it on her shoulder. After a while she got up and went out—still without one word to him.

And that afternoon, while the watchers sat at hand in the hospital ready to receive word the moment the crisis was reached by

her they loved, an actress who also loved her, under the bright lines of a rollicking farce, kept crying: "Come back, friend! Come back!"

And mayhap when the curtain went down an audience complained: "She isn't very good in that part." And while they picked flaws in her work where the manager might hear to her disadvantage—she frantically got off her make-up and sped through the subway to take up the vigil with those other watchers.

The halls of the hospital in that hour between daylight and lamplight were shadowy, and seemed full of the lingering, earth-bound spirits who had left their bodies in this room or that and sought to recover them. The odors of disinfectants filled the nostrils as the moans of sufferers filled the ears from time to time.

Esther had ceased her moaning; she lay there white and still, her eyes closed, a little rim of white showing beneath the dark lashes. Her mouth slightly open, she breathed as with difficulty through it.

The crisis was at hand. A nurse would go in, take her temperature, hand the thermometer to Barnes, and come out. And the watchers would look eagerly into her face for some sign, but nothing showed.

At seven o'clock, when Maida began to think she would have to go back to Brooklyn for the night performance, in that ward two doctors and a nurse bent over the suffering girl. The little thermometer was held in place by the nurse, while the two doctors, each holding a wrist, counted Esther's pulse. The thermometer was removed and handed to one of them, and the two straightened up and looked across the little white bed at each other—and smiled. And the nurse smiled.

There had been a sudden drop in temperature and pulse accordingly.

Barnes went at once into the anteroom. His illumined face proclaimed it as all the tongues could not have done. He did not attempt speech—just stood there and smiled.

"Thank God!" Maida cried. And Lillie laughed hysterically.

"Jimmie," Miss Mattie said querulously, "go wash your neck. It's dirty!"



"No, aunty, it's my whiskers." He grinned as blithely as though tragedy had not sat on his door-step for days.

"Which who cares if his neck is dirty!"—Ma broke out. Her voice was high-pitched and shrill. Philip and Sam and Barnes were shaking hands enthusiastically.

Ma turned to Miss Mattie, who was standing near by, grim and silent.

"Mrs. Frank, this is my aunt, Miss Truman—" Barnes was beginning.

Ma opened the floodgates:

"My goodness gracious! If I ain't that glad to meecher. Come on; go home with me, an' le's eat somethin' an' visit. I'm starved. An' I do wonder"—she looked at Sam—"if you be after my Lillie, which it looked like it, with you a holdin' hands all the time, an' it's scandalous in public if you ain't. An' I won't object, 'cause she's that miserable for the desert she makes me miserable to watch her."

Sam, completely taken off his feet by this proposition, colored violently and fumbled his hat in utter confusion. He liked Lillie; he thought her the one fine woman in New York besides Esther; but the idea of taking her back with him was one he might never have thought of.

"Better let them talk it over, Mrs. Frank," smiled the doctor, coming to Sam's rescue.

Lillie ran out of the room, and Sam followed her sheepishly. Putting notions in men's heads had long been an art with Ma, whose cool head had accumulated a good-sized fortune in spite of the size of her heart and the length of her tongue.

She bore Miss Mattie off in triumph to feed her as a special mark of approval.

Maida made a run for the subway, and it is possible that an audience said that night: "She's good in that part; but not pretty. Her eyes are too swollen-looking."

## CHAPTER XLII.

### THE END OF THE QUEST.

THE Big Chief of the seasons was at hand with his paint-pot and brush when Esther was taken to Ma Frank's.

Now she sat by the window, gazing out

at the melancholy autumnal beauty before her.

There was in her eyes a deep sadness, a question and—a fear.

She had that morning told Barnes all about the horror that had brought her and Paul's engagement to a close. He had listened intently, interrupting now and again to ask questions. What was the truth about the finding of Davis on her fire-escape? She had tried to tell him; and it had sounded so flat and trumped-up—not at all convincing in the face of the big, damning situation.

And then there was that matter of the character woman's accusation, that he had overheard in the theater, and that had never been cleared up—and she had had to tell him in detail about the money which she had really taken from Davis, and how she had come to do it. She would not lie to him in one smallest thing.

And again there had been that letter of credit Burt had given her. She told him of that voluntarily. She had wanted to get it all out—the whole truth, so there could be no ghosts to rise up and confront her some day—no skeletons to be forever hidden away in terror.

Then he had asked her all about hers and Philip's friendship. He had let her tell it without interruption, and somehow his grave eyes on her face had disquieted her. Did he believe her, or did he not? She had no way of telling. His face had been an inscrutable mask.

It had confused and upset her to have to sit there trying to explain something that had no explanation and needed none. How can we explain friendship? She had had a feeling of apologizing in an inane way for a thing the very apology for which was damning, not clearing, her. Clearing her of what? Philip's friendship?

She had felt weak and futile, and had talked and talked as though she were afraid to stop, afraid she would leave some hole in the thin fabric of truth that she spread before him. And he had let her talk.

When she had at last for no reason begun to cry he had put his arms gently—oh, so gently—around her and called her a "poor child," and said that if we sin against our

bodies we pay through them, and if we sin against the conventions we pay through them, one way or another. Nobody could escape the law. And he had kept saying poor child and soothing her, and finally she had gone to sleep through sheer weakness and excess of emotions.

When she woke Ma had told her that he had gone. He had not said where, but she had heard him talking over the phone. He had called up the Pennsylvania Station and had asked about a train—No. 20, he had called it. Then he had grabbed his hat and run out, calling to her not to wake Esther, and saying she would know where he had gone.

But Esther did not know. She could only guess. And she was horribly afraid.

He had asked a great deal about Philip, seeming to think more about him than about Burt Davis. And she had admitted that Philip had proposed to marry her after Paul broke with her. She wished she hadn't told the doctor that, after all. He was of a jealous nature. He had said it himself long ago. And he had seemed to think it strange that Philip should be so ready to propose to her after he had deliberately estranged himself from his wife and about her. It did look odd. Why had Philip done it? Poor Philip, he was so big and fine, and he seemed always making mistakes, just as she was always doing.

Vaguely it came to her that perhaps some strange force had linked her destiny with that of this brilliant Frenchman, whether they would have it so or not. As he said, they never jarred, were good friends, and perhaps understood each other as no other ever had or ever could understand either of them.

Well, she was through. Nothing mattered. She was just tired and wanted to rest. As she had scorned Paul in his weakness, so now she scorned herself as she laid her head back and closed her eyes.

She thought sadly of poor Paul, whose only sin had been that of loving too well, and whose ship of life had been wrecked by his own indulgence.

Esther closed her eyes. When she opened them a tall young woman stood in her doorway.

The graceful, white-clad figure, slim and supple as a young willow, appeared to sway toward her, and she was in the room. She seemed not to have walked there at all. Her soft black hair contrasted oddly with large, deep-blue eyes. They were wide-open eyes, almost childlike in expression, and gave an air of youth to the tall, fragile form.

"She reminds me of somebody," Esther thought, and waited for the woman to speak. A mellow laugh came to her.

"Oh, it can't!" Esther whispered. A picture of an ashen-faced, emaciated woman with dull blue eyes and dry wisps of straw-colored hair presented to her memory.

Then the woman spoke.

Something in her voice made Esther recall the horrible curse Maida Ayers had pronounced against Belle Benton. It was the same voice, only fuller, richer.

The woman was smiling at her.

"I've come back—friend!" she said in her rich contralto. "And so have you!"

Maida had not been to see Esther since that night when they had all waited in the anteroom of the hospital for the doctors to pronounce sentence on the girl in the adjoining ward.

By phone she had kept posted as to Esther's progress. Flowers had come daily bearing a card on which was the single word: "Friend."

And Esther had wondered about the unknown giver. Now she knew. She lifted her arms toward the woman, who dropped on her knees beside Esther's chair, and they were crying happily in each other's arms.

"Maida, you're wonderful!" Esther smiled through her tears after a while. "I didn't recognize you at all. How have you done it?"

"Happiness!" the woman responded radiantly. "That is the real miracle-maker. And I've been eating and working to get back my looks. Burt's out there," she said shyly. "He hid behind the door so I could come in alone. Oh, Burt!" she called.

He fairly bounded into the room.

"Hello, kid!" he shouted at Esther. "Some girly, isn't she?" He grabbed Es-



ther's hand, but his eyes clung hungrily to Maida. It was as if he could not take them off her even to look at an old friend.

"Honestly, you don't look a day over twenty-five," Esther said to her.

"Don't I, truly?" Maida laughed happily.

"Truly. You're so willowy, and yet not at all skinny."

"You know I'm not really old, anyhow," Maida protested. "Trouble and drugs made me look so. I've gone back now to pick up my lost youth; and you, dear—honestly, those short red curls of yours make you look like a beautiful boy. I pin my hair back and wear a braid. It isn't over six inches long. You see, I cut off the peroxid."

Burt sat uninvited, ignored by the women while they discussed each other's beauty, but he was obviously and flagrantly happy.

"Your skin is like—like—not a sea-shell," Maida floundered; "it's not pink enough. I know! A pearl."

"Yours is the sea-shell," Esther said. "But tell me, how did you ever—"

"Cut the drugs. You remember that night when—"

"Yes."

"Well, I didn't have any money and I joined a tent show. We worked up into the Dakotas. It took me nearly three months to get my little nest-egg laid by; then I went to Sun River Valley, and took your letter to Sam."

"Tell me all about it," Esther said.

And Maida told in detail of the wonder of her cure. And every word of praise for the doctor tore at Esther's heart.

"After I'd put on a little more flesh I came back to New York and got work jobbing around town," Maida went on. "I was in no hurry to find Burt, on account of my looks. We women are so vain, and I figured if I hadn't lost him in all these years I wasn't likely to now. I was backstage in Brooklyn one night when the leading woman got temperamental and walked out with her make-up on. The bill was 'The Two Orphans.' I had played the part, so I went on and made good."

"And she's signed for a part with a pro-

duction next year," broke in Burt, unable to keep quiet any longer. "I went up to my old man—you see, I've got a real show now, kid—and I says to him, 'See here, my wife—'"

"Your wife?" Esther interrupted.

Burt flushed and looked down and picked at his finger-nails.

"You see, kid," he stammered. "Well, the fact is, I only *said* I was married to Belle."

"Yep," he grinned a little sheepishly. "We went before Judge Colvin, and—"

"We had been married by the church," Maida broke in, "but I was about crazy, and I got a divorce, so we had to go before the judge to get it patched up again."

Esther was wondering about Belle when Maida mentioned her. She wasn't altogether responsible for the havoc she had brought to Esther. She was under the influence of others and—well, she was a little "off."

"That's my punishment," Maida said sadly. "When I heard how she was I went and got her. She was in such an awful state." There were tears in her large blue eyes. "But she is better—much better," Maida went on. "I've done what I could for her."

Sam and the solemn-eyed Lillie joined the party.

"This is my reception day," cried Esther with a pathetic little attempt at gaiety. The while her heart cried: "Where is my man?"

Sam and Lillie, however, were both wretchedly anxious to get something said.

At last Sam got it out.

"Me 'n' Lillie here has decided to git hitched. She can't stand this here city no way at all, an' I'm so blamed lonesome—, an', well, her ma put hit in our heads, so we jest naturally decided to do her."

"Oh, Sam! I'm so glad," Esther said.

"I told her all about lovin'"—Sam looked around sheepishly and finished—"somebody else an' she said she allowed I sort of worshiped—somebody else an' I could love her—I mean I could love Lillie jest the same 'cause she ain't hankerin' to be worshiped nohow."

Lillie looked shyly at Sam's hearers.

There were joyous congratulations all around. Ma came in with cake and lemonade to make it a real celebration. She talked voluminously the while.

It was after the little party had broken up that Philip came in.

"I want to say good-by," he said in his old, impulsive way.

"Good-by?" Esther repeated. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to France," he said.

Then he told her the particulars of that stormy interview with his lawyers on his return from Boston, and for which cause his mother-in-law had not tried to effect the reconciliation begun by Aline's withdrawal of suit.

Having definitely decided that *too much money* was at the bottom of all his troubles, he had, true to form, in his quick, decisive way, divested himself, with supreme indifference, of his entire fortune. Part of it he had given toward the restoration of Belgium, part of it sent munitions to his own native France, and part to the land of his adoption, at that time just on the point of entering the war, for the purpose of building airplanes. He had also made application to enter the French aviation corps.

Of a race that is governed by its emotions, patriotic to the exclusion of self, his action was eminently characteristic. Whether added to these was a desire to mete out justice to the woman whose selfishness had brought death and ruin to his friends and himself, no one knew; but certain it is that when Mrs. Grenville asked for a wife's portion she could not get it for the very simple reason that her husband had nothing to divide.

However that may be, he had achieved a rarely brilliant stroke—one that few men have the courage to achieve; he had thrown off the yoke that had been the cause of his boredom, and in so doing had brought into his life aim and interest, without which life is an arid, monotonous desert, though its sands be gold.

"Hello, Grenville!" came a hearty voice from the doorway. They turned with a start to see Barnes smiling at them. "Well, dear, it's all settled," he said to Esther as he came into the room.

"What is settled?" she asked, her voice shaking, her eyes alight.

"Why, that offer from St. Anne's Hospital," he replied, in evident surprise at her question. "Don't you know I told you yesterday about an offer I had from a hospital in Philadelphia, and that I would go over to-day?"

"I forgot," she said faintly.

He went and sat beside her. "I didn't wake you because you needed the rest, and I thought you would know where I was."

"I know now," she smiled.

And Philip, with a glad light in his eyes, rose to go.

"You've found it, little friend," he said, taking her hand, "and you will appreciate and keep it because it has come to you through suffering. Everything is relative. How can any man know when he has happiness, if he has had no suffering to measure it by?"

"Just so," smiled Barnes. "How can anybody know the comfort of being without a headache till he has had one?"

Philip took Esther's hand in good-by.

Barnes did not look at them. He understood, as man seldom can, such a friendship.

After Philip was gone, Barnes went over and took her on his lap.

Then time stood still. Sight, sound, thought, were not. The world, the universe, were not.

Ma Frank, panting up the stairs, stopped as her eyes reached the level of Esther's half-opened door.

"My goodness gracious!" she gasped. "It's as good as a movie, which they ought to close that door, what with losing one finansée an' gettin' another one, all in the same breath, it's plumb romantic an' just magic which I *do believe in*." And she hobbled softly back down the stairs.

Esther closed her eyes, and he seemed content to let her do so. Presently she stirred.

"Jim, I ought not to marry you," she murmured.

"How's that?"

"You went off and left me to marry Paul Evers—"

"You sent me."



"But you shouldn't have let me."

He looked at her in amazement.

"I couldn't take you against your will."

"But it wouldn't have been against my will. I almost died when you left me."

"Well, how was I to know that?"

"You should have. I don't like a man who gives up too easily."

Dr. Barnes's masculine mind struggled with this a moment, then he burst out laughing. "More woman stuff," he said. "Well, anyway, I'm not going to let you get away from me this time."

Time again stood still.

"Sweetheart," he whispered eventually.

(The End.)

"Yes—dearest?"

"I've made a great scientific discovery."

"What?"

"Hell and heaven are both in New York. Hell is richly curtained, and has lion and leopard skins and statues and pictures all about. Heaven is a rather garish room, with a red carpet and a lot of cheap furniture."

"So have I made a discovery," Esther said softly.

"What is it?"

"That, search as she may, the world, for a woman, narrows down to her man—and is within his heart—and hers."



# The Wild Woman

by

Lyon Mearson



## I.

THE beautiful, pink-clad bodies of six acrobats teetered dangerously upon the Wagneresque shoulders and arms of Mrs. Jiminez, favorably known in private life as Mamie Boyle, the strong woman of the Gymnastic Jiminez Troupe, eight, count 'em, eight. A flushed, untroubled footlight smile was on her countenance, and her feet, clad in soft shoes, were firmly planted on the firmer shoulders of Rodriguez Jiminez, the strongest man in vaudeville (see booking notices).

They swayed until it was seen that they could not recover, and sharply, out over the footlights, went the staccato cry of the acrobats just before the final somersault:

"Ee-ee-ee—yah! Hup!" The perfectly formed bodies swung out and down; a neat somersault landed each on its feet, and they stood there, smiling and bowing to an applauding sea of faces and hands. The curtain went down.

They took as many curtain calls as the law allowed. When Jiminez was finally assured that not a palm in the house was stirring, they turned toward their dressing-rooms.

He and Mamie Boyle paused outside of the door of her dressing-room, where they made a pair that might well have warranted a second glance from anybody. He was tall and wonderfully formed, but no taller nor any better formed than was she. Under their pink fleshings, even in repose, during

the ordinary gestures of conversation, their muscles slid and glided like smooth, silent snakes. His face was that of a Gallic god, with its fine complexion and pointed, up-turned mustache, and hers the face of a Gaelic goddess translated into Greek.

He looked at her a little dubiously as they stood there outside of the green door.

"I have desirings you should mak' dinings weet me thees night," he ventured.

Her fine face was suffused with the quick color of anger.

"Why, you poor, acrobatic simp," she snapped at him wrathfully, "I told you once before I would not 'mak' dinings weet you' to-night."

He flushed. "You will not mak' dinings among me for reasons that I are a seemp of acrobatics—eet ees then that perhapsly eet ees of preference unto you to mingle among seemps of tamers of tame animals?" he asked courteously, twirling his mustache.

"An animal tamer can be a gentleman, at least," she said pointedly, and Jiminez flushed again.

"You are belongings of me," he said heatedly. There are no half-measure with the hot, Gallic blood. When a woman is his, she is his, and that is all there is to it.

She tossed her fine head and the daggers flashed. "We are not married yet, *Mister Jiminez*. You foreigners who think a woman belongs to you had better snap out of it—women don't *belong* to any one in this man's country."

"Eet ees better, perhapsly," he persisted, "that you should mak' informings to the tamer of tame lions that it shall yet, for me, be necessario to strike him weeth a hardness of such that hees ideas weel be separate' from hees habeets—ees eet not so?"

"No, eet ees not so," she mimicked, crinkling up her nose in comic imitation of him. "You keep your lunch-hooks offen Mr. Warden, or it will be 'necessario' for me to slip you something you won't forget in a hurry." She glanced significantly at the solitaire ring on her engagement finger, and he understood. She burst through the green dressing-room door, and it banged in his angry face.

The trouble between them was the dif-

ference in standards. The standards of Mamie Boyle and Rodriguez Jiminez, though sharply defined to each, were widely divergent. It was enough for the hot-blooded Jiminez that this woman had consented to be his wife—she belonged to him henceforth. Either a woman was his love, or she was to him no more than any casual lamp-post on any casual side street. He assumed toward her all the authority and dictatorship that one must never, under any circumstances, assume toward any Irish girl. She was his—and there were for her no other male creatures on this earth.

Mamie Boyle, as has been said, was Irish. This should explain a great deal. It was not the substance of Jiminez's attitude toward her that angered her—it was the manner of it. She would not have minded so much being wooed and won by storm, and being kept constant by a reign of love-terrorism. It was the way he assumed toward her, as though she were a chattel, something that had once said 'yes' and would thenceforth stay put.

Mamie had no intention of staying put. No true woman has. A woman must be wooed many times after she is won, and it was this elementary bit of psychology that eluded him. If he had not been so nastily arbitrary and imperious in the matter, it is very probable that she would never have troubled to take up with Tony Warden at all—she had gone out to eat with him once, when Jiminez could not come, for some reason, and she had not wanted to go alone. Jiminez made such a fuss about it that she went again, out of sheer Irish perversity.

He was also unspeakably annoyed because he never got anywhere with her in a quarrel—she always had the last word, and it always silenced him.

Now, the truth of the matter is that they were both wrong, and as they really cared a great deal for each other, the more wrong they were the more they quarreled. So that night Tony Warden and Mamie Boyle ate together—and Jiminez chewed his black mustache and nursed a man's-sized grouch.

## II.

"MISS JIMINEZ"—and Tony Warden smiled at Mamie insinuatingly—"I never



could make out why you hang out with that English-assassinating dago." He paused tentatively, and toyed with a long string of spaghetti on the end of a meditative fork.

"He is not a dago, Mr. Warden," she said icily. "His blood is pure Castilian—and, say, go a little easy on that Jiminez stuff—my name is Mamie Boyle to you and to every one else. Get me?" she inquired.

"Yep," he smiled admiringly. "Gee, you look great when you're mad!" She smiled—what woman can help smiling at a compliment, especially if two-twelfths of a dozen dimples are placed alluringly, one on each side of her Grecian face. He smiled back at her, and their comradeship was again established.

He went on: "And as for the guy with the pure castile so—"

"Castilian!" she corrected him.

"Castilian—I knew it was some kind of soap—blood, anything you say goes, Mamie."

She smiled at him again. It had come to her that she had better not antagonize Warden if she intended to use him to irritate Jiminez. He, of course, did not know he was being used, and took unto himself her smile as a tribute to his personality.

It was several days after this that the real break occurred between her and Jiminez. They had had several spats over the matter, in which Jiminez had always been a close runner-up for first place, but never quite made it. She always managed to edge in a little ahead to the wire—the last word was always hers, and it usually stung. But one day he slipped it to her.

They were performing one of their best stunts. High up in the wings swayed a trapeze. From this trapeze, head downward, hung Jiminez, with a strong tooth-strap in his hands. From this strap hung Mamie Boyle, depending therefrom solely by her strong white teeth, and from her arms and legs hung four members of the Gymnastic Jiminez Troupe.

This was the moment Jiminez seized to give her a pretty and artistic young bawling out—a moment when she could not reply and had to take it standing up, so to speak. It is a maddening thing to do to a woman, not to give her a chance to answer.

He gazed down at her sardonically. "So, eet ees that now travel you weet' half-portion of tamers of seeck lions, eh?" he smiled at her genially, mockingly. She looked up at him and smiled rosiely—that was for the audience, which was breathless—and if the four Jiminezes who depended upon her strength could have seen what was in her eyes they would have known how close they came to landing on the stage in nothing, flat.

He continued: "Some day shall I take him apart, that I may see what mak' heem go, no?" He smiled at her again. She looked up at him in impotent rage, and her lips smiled genially.

"Ah, that so brave queller of animals what they are debeelitated, homeseeck, perhapsly—" and so on and so on for the full period of their stay in the wings. And he got the last word, with never a reply—but, the Jiminez troupe came closer to broken bones and a busted act on that day than in many a day.

He was very pleased with himself, and back of the scenes he sauntered past her, lightly trilling a little tune:

"I have no desirings of recovery,  
I have no desirings of recovery,  
For I love a so-beautiful nurse! I love a—"

"Say!" She brought him up with a jump, and he bit off his song in the middle.

"You weesh to mak' conversings weet' me, Mamie?" he asked politely.

"No! I don't want no conversation. I want to tell you something. You talk so much about Mr. Warden having no nerve, and all that sort of stuff, but I don't see you pulling no Croix de Guerre stuff around here. And, furthermore, *Mister Jiminez*, I don't think I ever will, either. No man who can take such a mean advantage of a woman as to bawl her out when she has no chanst of opening her mouth to defend herself, can possibly have any more backbone than a banana.

"And I want to tell you something else," she continued, thoroughly maddened, "and that is, that if you ever venture to lay the weight of your finger on Mr. Warden, I'll slam you so hard that three minutes later you will have been dead a year. I'm

through with you," she panted. "I belong to Mamie Boyle, and no one else."

She tore off the ring from her finger and handed it to him. He took it mechanically, dazed. He had no idea things would get so out of hand.

As she went into her dressing-room she turned and added irrelevantly: "I don't see you trying to collect no five hundred from Tony Warden."

The door slammed, and he stood there, stupidly holding a magnificent diamond solitaire in his great ham of a hand.

You see, they were both too much in love and too obstinate to see the reasonable or humorous side of anything. The breach between them had started with a very small thing, but it was large to them—a postage stamp is small until you place it in front of your eyes; then it shuts out your world. And these two had placed postage stamps in front of their eyes until their collective world was entirely cut off—meaning each other.

Mamie did not foregather with anybody during the next few days, least of all Tony Warden. She cut him off entirely—he was through, so far as she was concerned. And Jiminez, when not on the stage, brooded in his dressing-room or in his room at the hotel.

He lived over every word that they had had together—heard again ringing in his ears every sentence—particularly the last: "I don't see you trying to collect no five hundred from Tony Warden." That was simply a slap at his courage delivered by Mamie in the heat of anger (she knew he was afraid of nothing under the stars), and the more he thought of it the angrier he got.

The taunt had to do with Warden's animal act. As an added feature, in addition to his regular animal act, he had a small, very fierce lion that had never been tamed. They said it was a man-eater, and perhaps it was; the fact of the matter was, it was very intractable, and it was a dangerous matter to enter the cage where this lion was confined, or, for that matter, to pass near the cage within reach of the paws.

There was a reward of five hundred dollars to any one in the audience who would undertake to tame the animal—and, so far,

nobody had collected. The lion was small—almost ridiculously small—and fierce out of all decent proportion to his size. He was kept on the verge of starvation, which didn't help his temper much, but added a great deal to his stage value. That was the five hundred dollars she wanted him to collect.

Yellow, was he? Banana-backed, eh? For four days Jiminez brooded in his dressing-room, and on the fifth day a resolve came to him.

### III.

THEY were at Noli's, in New Haven, at the time. Their booking had carried them together for some weeks—they were booked from the same office, Warden and Jiminez.

In single grandeur, on the stage, rested the lion, safely behind the stout iron bars of a comfortably strong cage. Warden, a dapper little man, stepped to the front center to address the audience, and the lion arose and commenced to walk to and fro, lashing his tail wrathfully.

"Now, laideez and gen'lemen," he bally-hooed, "we present for your careful consideration the king—the emperor, rather—of the untracked wilds of the African jungle, brought here to this fair city at tremendous eggspense, accompanied by untold dangers. This monnirk of the wilds, laideez and gen'lemen, has never been tamed"—the "monnirk" lashed his tail more rapidly and growled viciously as he looked out over the audience, a small figure contemptuously to defy so vast a sea of faces—"and if there are any among you who have any aspirations in the way of lion-taming, they are invited to step forward now.

"Five hundred dollars, laideez and gen'lemen, five hundred hones'-t'-Gawd dollars will be paid to any man, woman or child who can accomplish what the crowned heads of Yurrop have failed to accomplish. There are no limitations on this offer, nobody is barred, regardless of color or denomination. And, remember," he added significantly, glancing back at his emperor of the wilds, "the management assumes no responsibility—it is understood that you do everything at your own risk."

He paused and stepped aside, waiting



pointedly for the would-be lion-tamers. Nobody made a move toward the stage.

"Does no one need five hunderd of our best dollars," he taunted. "Come up—come up—all you have to do is tame him—it's like getting money from home." The house snickered.

There was a craning of necks and a scattering of applause as the colossal figure of Rodriguez Jiminez, in his fleshings, came forward to the center of the stage from the wings. Tony Warden turned to him and smiled.

"I possess desirings for tamings of wild emperor," opened Jiminez grandiloquently, waving his hand lightly toward the vicious beast.

"Stay away, Jiminez," said Warden under his breath, "this beast is a killer."

"Go to it, kid!" came from the gallery.

"I have wishes to mingle among this half-portion monarch," he said loudly this time, so all the house could hear. That was no place to argue, so Warden smiled and assented, though he commented to himself on the futility of arguing with fools.

"Mr. Jiminez will play with the kitten—he says," announced Warden to the house. It might be noted that there was no very great danger; stage hands with long prods were conveniently stationed to drive off the beast if he got the upper hand, but there was seldom any use for their services, as it was rare for any one to accept the challenge of the lion.

"Jimmy!" came a sharp cry to him out of the wings. He turned and beheld Mamie Boyle, in her pink fleshings, just as she had rushed out of her dressing-room when she heard what was happening on the stage. She was making frantic motions to him to keep away from the lion. He smiled sarcastically and shook his head.

Warden stepped to the cage and opened the door tentatively, and Jiminez sidled in quickly. The door clanged behind him. The lion crouched in the opposite corner, switching his tail viciously as he crouched.

"Jimmy!" came a frenzied cry to him again. "Take this with you," and a baseball bat which she had thrown through the bars clanged on the floor. He turned his head to look at her for a brief moment.

That was enough for the beast, infuriated by this violation of his kingly privacy.

Like a streak of vivified lightning he leaped, striking Jiminez at the shoulder. Thrown off his balance Jiminez fell. As he fell his head struck the steel hinge of the door. A dead silence went through the house as the horrified audience saw what had happened.

Dazed by the impact of his head on the steel hinge, Jiminez was prone and motionless on the floor of the cage, with the now thoroughly enraged beast above him. A broad streak of red began to show through the torn shoulder of his pink tights.

A woman in the audience shrieked.

The stage hands with the prods rushed forward, but there was one who was quicker. The lion raised his head for an instant and looked out over the audience. In that instant Mamie Boyle, red with honest Gaelic anger, burst through the door.

Before the giant cat had a chance to recover, he was seized in two muscular arms and thrown the length of the cage, where he struck the iron bars with a dull crash that certainly must have shaken more breath out of him than he would have cared to admit.

Instantly Mamie picked up the bat, which fortunately lay ready to her hand. The lion leaped. Mamie stepped aside, and Hans Wagner's powerful muscles never acted in more perfect unison than Mamie's, as she met the king of beasts square on the nose with the bat, never bothering even to see that the label was uppermost. A roar of wounded rage and surprise came from the lion as he leaped again, frantic from the pain of his broken nose.

Mamie knocked a home-run again. "Ye dhir-r-ty baste!" she panted, lapsing into her brogue, which she did when really excited. "Oi'll larn ye t' attact a unpertected ackerbat." Bang! Bang again! Jiminez was sitting up now.

"That certainly are good chastisings, heart of my heart," he encouraged weakly.

The lion by this time was in full flight, crouching in the corners and endeavoring ever to keep on the opposite side of the cage from this avenging devil of a woman. She followed him around excitedly, her war-

club falling and rising regularly, in time to her good Irish imprecations. The house was in pandemonium. A bell rang and the curtain fell.

"That'll cost you just five hundred bucks, *Mister Warden*," said Mamie Boyle.

"Cost *me*? What for?" he echoed.

"For taming your lion, of course," she answered easily, her giant figure towering above him. "That'll teach you never to permit anybody to be alone in a cage with a wild beast again," she said grimly. She had seen the blood of her beloved, and there was anger in her soul.

"You're dam' right!" he snapped at her. "I should never have permitted that poor, dumb beast to be alone in a cage with you. Tamed him, did you? I'll tell you what you did," the little fellow almost shrieked in his mingled rage and grief. "You ruined him—that's what you did. Just plumb wrecked him! That lion will never have any faith in human nature again. Five hundred dollars fer taming him—why, you—you—wild woman, you tore up my meal-ticket, that's what you did. The lion may get over it, but he'll never be the same again.

"Tamed him! Oh, hell!" He threw up his hands in despair and walked rapidly

away, to sit up all night with a very sick emperor of the trackless jungles.

A tentative, timid knock came at the dressing-room door of Jiminez.

"Enter, then," he boomed.

Mamie came in.

Jiminez bounded to his feet and bowed to the chair. "Mak' reposings thereupon, soul of my soul," he said.

She sat down. "Oh, Jimmy," she said happily, "know what? The manager is moving us up to head-line position for the week—says the town will go crazy over us with all the advertising this is going to give us. And it's all due to you, Jimmy," she went on, "because you were so brave as to go into that lion's cage—"

"It are nothings whatever, my own," he interrupted. "It are all your accountings, sweetest girl what are, because of that so splendid batting of one thousand per cent. Dear heart," he beamed upon her tenderly, "certainly are you much possessed of—how you say—some wallop! I kees the feetses of you."

"Oh, Jimmy!" she breathed tenderly. "Where are those so-sparkling of diamond ring," she laughed in his ear, mimickingly (her arm was around his neck—and the rest of this is hardly any of your affair).

# Found

by

## Royce Brier



THE boy dressed in the blue of the old army stood for a long moment gazing at the interior of the La Salle Street Station, as one might look fondly on the scenes of a childhood home.

He was a tall boy, and clean of limb, but he was distressingly emaciated. Blue veins stood out on his hands as on the hands of an old lady, and his face was pasty white, except for a highly flushed spot at



the point of each cheek-bone. In his gray eyes burned the fires of fever.

Despite all this, ecstasy was evident on the boy's countenance.

Chicago!

At length he hailed a cab, and discounting the plodding leisure of the horse-drawn vehicles of those days, was soon up-town. There, while he awaited a trolley-car, the same warm ecstasy gripped his heart. The hurrying thousands of State Street wrapped him in the lure of his city. Eagerly he watched for his car, the same car that had countless times whirled him from the down-town office to his home.

Home!

How he counted the streets—streets that he knew by heart. And each block seemed a mile, each quarter of an hour an era. The old conductor was gone from the car.

"I understand he died in Cuba," said the new conductor to the boy's query. "San Juan."

"I almost died in Cuba," returned the boy with a wan smile. "But not San Juan—malaria."

"These Lake Michigan breezes and home cookin' 'll fix you up," said the other in kindly sympathy.

Through the gathering dusk of the early evening the boy walked slowly up his front walk. The combination of rheumatic pains and excitement almost prevented his getting up the front steps of the tiny porch. The house was dark, but that was not unusual. The front door was locked, but no one had known of his home-coming. With a key he admitted himself. The house was cold.

Suddenly an impalpable sense of things amiss swept over him like a chill. He remembered that there had been newspapers on the front porch. He stepped into the living-room of his home. Dust was deep on the little imitation-oak center table. In the center of the table lay a note. The boy held a match to the gas light.

He looked at the lavender note-paper for a long time. Doubtless he read the note a score of times. He stood moveless, his face untouched by any emotion. The same high flush burned at the points of his cheek-bones. The same fires of fever burned in his gray eyes.

And then the boy suddenly dropped into an old hair-cloth chair which stood beside the table. He bent over the table, laying his head on his arms, the lavender note fallen from nerveless, outstretched fingers. For hours he did not stir under the cold, white flame of the gaslight, nor did he make a sound.

The man was sitting in the Palm Court of the hotel, partaking of a late dinner.

In strange dissimilarity to the shabby little room of the past was the glittering Palm Court. Instead of imitation oak, sleek brown mahogany; instead of hair-cloth, blue tapestry cushions, sensuous in their deepness; instead of a wan gas flame, vast chandeliers, bedazzling with their myriad electrics. All of this in a score of years.

The man was one to be distinguished in any gathering of men. Standing, he would have been tall, and without moving there clung about him the air of liteness of a beast of prey. His hair was white, though perhaps prematurely so, for he appeared not above forty years of age. His face was lean and gray, his lips thin and straight, bespeaking an unshakable will. But his eyes—they were the glittering cold eyes of the panther, and in them lived a remorseless something which could barely be sensed, much less can it be described.

Twice the man answered the singsong voice of a bell-boy, calling his name: "Mr. Hobart—Mr. Hobart—Mr. John Hobart!"

When the man answered his voice was strange by contrast, a cold, leashed thing, minding of the curt clink of steel on steel.

At length John Hobart arose and left the Palm Court. Summoning a taxicab, he was swirled down-town, and alighted on a crowded corner. Then he made his way west, walking swiftly, block by block coming into a meaner portion of the city.

Finally reaching a dingy house choked between two other dingy houses, John Hobart entered and mounted a dark stairway. The odor of cooking food hung in the air with the oppressiveness of an anesthetic.

With a key that rattled ominously in the lock, the man admitted himself to a shoddy little room, papered hideously, and lighted by the sickly flame of a gas-jet.

In a few moments the man had changed his dress suit for clothing of uncertain cut and color. A soft felt hat covered his eyes without seeming to do so. From the top drawer of a bureau he took an automatic, a jimmy, and a black silk handkerchief.

Gaining the street, he walked swiftly in the direction of down-town. A mist had swept up from the waters of the bay. The man passed many with ulsters buttoned close about their throats. Long shafts of light from motor headlights swung to and fro in the shrouded streets. Far out over the city was the dull orange glow of reflected light. Somewhere a clock chimed nine times.

The man arrived in a busy part of the city; in fact, he was but three blocks distant from the hotel where an hour before he had sat in the quiet of the great Palm Court and taken a late dinner.

John Hobart stood on a curb for some time, gazing at the huge building on the opposite side of the street. In the far corner of the building was a light—and the man frowned. But obstacles, to John Hobart, were but incentives to their overcoming, and the light in the window of the huge building did not long deter him.

He walked along the side of the building, then without so much as a glance behind him turned into a dark alley. With the agility of an acrobat he swung up on the fire-escape, and scaling it, reached the fourth floor.

It was but a matter of minutes until he had pried open a fire door. From the edge of the fire-escape he peered for a moment into the gloomy abyss of the alley; then he was engulfed in the blackness of the big building.

The place that the man purposed to rob was the Mammoth Department Store. Along one end of the fourth floor was a glass partition, shutting off the general offices. Behind that glass partition there was a safe which John Hobart knew contained money.

Now, John Hobart was no small criminal, and it boots little where he gained the knowledge that the safe held treasure. Suffice it to say that such knowledge on his part reasonably argued its truth.

The light in one of the general offices John Hobart liked not at all, for in certain circumstance it might perforce mean delay, and the burglar knew full well that the "bulls and dicks" have sharper eyes at two in the morning than they do when the theater crowds of ten and eleven flood the city's streets.

Noiselessly John Hobart slipped between the ghostly counters, pausing now and again as though to listen. Suddenly he melted into a shadow, swallowed completely. From half a block away on the first floor there came to him the sound of a closing door.

John Hobart crouched in the blackness beside a counter. Soon he heard the creaking of stairs under heavy footsteps, then the hollow echo of those steps scarce a rod from him. Almost he could reach out and touch the intruder, a big man who walked stealthily down the main aisle approaching the general offices.

John Hobart continued his silent march toward the glass partition. Rounding a high stock shelf he came upon a strange scene. It was a scene such as one may encounter daily at the movies, and in actual life not at all.

Facing one another across a massive oak-table stood a man and a girl. The burglar could only judge the man from the pumpkinlike head which rested upon his shoulders, and the glint of a diamond from his pudgy fingers. The girl was facing in the direction of the burglar, and he saw that the beauty of her face was distorted by a look of abject terror.

John Hobart listened intently:

"—Night watchman—sent home—back for three hours—don't be a fool—"

Suddenly the burglar saw the girl make a quick movement, as though to reach the door, but the man seized her in his arms. She struggled futilely, like a spent bird battling a gale.

John Hobart was no sickly sentimentalist, nor was he prone to mock-heroics. The petty individual problems of these two before him were no concern of his, albeit their common problem was his concern were they permitted to cause a tumult. John Hobart did not relish the calling out of the reserves.



Swiftly yet silently he ran the length of the glass partition—and threw a master switch. With eery suddenness the scuffling in the offices ceased. The burglar heard the drawn shade of the window facing the street being raised, doubtless for the purpose of observing whether or not lights across the street were burning.

All that could be heard were the muttered curses of the man and the sobbing of the girl. Deliberately the burglar covered his face below the eyes with the black silk handkerchief.

"Open the door!" commanded John Hobart abruptly, and in a cold and level voice.

A key grated in the lock.

Again came the cold, calculated voice of the burglar, incisive, brooking no dalliance.

"Go stand against the dull light of that alley window—the woman, too!"

A large, dark form and a smaller one were etched against the light of the designated window. With a lightning movement the burglar was within the glass partition. There was no sound save heavy breathing.

John Hobart's voice cut the gloom, and he was not prolix in his warning:

"Don't move—don't make a mistake."

Utilizing a pencil flash lamp which gave off but a dim, circular glow of light, the burglar set to work on the safe. Scarce had he worked a dozen seconds when the girl commenced afresh to sob.

"Here! Lay off that!" John Hobart snarled, whirling round in the gloom and taking a step toward the window where the two stood. "This ain't a vaudeville skit."

The girl did not cease sobbing.

"You little devil, you! I can't hear these bolts. I'll take you out of here when I go, if you'll shut up."

At that the girl quieted, and the burglar continued his labors for half of an hour. The big doors swung open.

It was the swinging open of the big doors that caused the man silhouetted against the light of the alley window to make a false move. John Hobart caught the man cleanly on the point of the jaw, and he collapsed like a punctured toy balloon. The burglar said not a word, but rifled the safe. Then he swung the doors shut, and looked about him.

"C'm'on," he said finally to the girl.

Together, they made their way between the high-piled counters. Reaching the ground floor, the burglar jimmied open a fire door at the far end of the alley from the one where he had entered.

The girl was amazed at the abrupt change in the burglar's mood, and his mode of speech.

"My dear young lady," he said, "it was indeed thoughtful of your employer—I take it that he is your employer—to send the night watchman out to his home. Should you see the gentleman to-morrow—though you doubtless will not after this evening's experience—convey to him, if you please, my gratitude."

As the door swung open the burglar's voice became one of harsh, cold irony.

"I would advise," he said, "that you refrain from acquainting the first policeman you encounter with the fact that there is some one in this building."

"Oh! After you helped me escape that—that—"

John Hobart shut the door on her words and returned to the office on the fourth floor. A few minutes later he was on the street.

A dense fog smothered the city.

The following morning, over grapefruit, bacon and eggs, John Hobart stared in consternation at his newspaper:

#### JAMES BARRETT MURDERED IN HIS OFFICE.

Night Watchman Discovers Body of Mammoth Store Superintendent—His Private Secretary Held—Admits Being in Store, But Denies Knowledge of Crime.

John Hobart's consternation lay not in the printed knowledge that James Barrett was dead. He himself had done away with the merchant in much the same spirit that one might do away with a rattlesnake. Discounting the fact that the burglar was a trespasser and the merchant not, there had been some slight excuse. Upon the burglar's returning to the office, the merchant, come from his unconsciousness, had leaped upon him, and had paid for his foolhardiness with his life.

But John Hobart was overwhelmed with consternation—that Mary Breen should have been discovered in connection with the crime at all. And as he read on, John Hobart cursed himself with a silent curse, revelled in self-hatred. The girl's tam-o'-shanter had been discovered in the office by the night watchman.

He, John Hobart, to whom the most inconsiderable detail had ever loomed large, whose work had heretofore been free from any flaw—he had been guilty of an oversight worthy of the rawest amateur. Beyond measure he was disgusted with himself.

Of course, he could do nothing for the girl. It was unfortunate. It was one of those untoward incidents of life which are regrettable but irreparable, such as the running down of a little child with a motor-car.

It was but natural that John Hobart should attend the trial of Mary Breen. But make no mistake. He was not "drawn" to the trial as are some criminals in like circumstance. There was nothing of the craven in John Hobart's nature. Moreover, his confidence in self amounted to a mania, and he had no slightest fear of detection. He was interested in the fate of Mary Breen, and he attended her trial. That was all.

From the first he was aware that there was no hope for the girl. The circumstantial evidence was overwhelming. There was her tam-o'-shanter. She had been absent from her boarding-house, and had returned later in the evening in a state of great agitation.

There was but one thing which, in the light of what John Hobart knew of the crime, might save her—the presence of a burglar on the night of the murder. But apprehending the burglar was another matter altogether, and John Hobart smiled at the absurdity of the thought.

John Hobart admired the girl's attorney for his astuteness in saving the burglar sensation for the final day of the trial. Apparently this lawyer was no fool, for he had accomplished the seemingly impossible in suppressing all general knowledge that several thousand dollars had been missing

from the safe of James Barrett's office. But fool or superman, John Hobart's self-assurance pursued its even tenor.

On the third day of the trial John Hobart took a seat in the front row. Through impersonal eyes he gazed on the mental suffering of the girl as she went through a cross-examination. Without emotion he saw her collapse at its end.

Shortly the counsel for the defense spoke:

"Your Honor, and Gentlemen of the Jury: A peculiar fact has arisen in connection with this crime, establishing a point which cannot but have effect upon your verdict."

John Hobart knew that the moment had come, and he gloried in the sensation which was about to occur—the murmur that would go through the audience—the tumult as the spectators arose to their feet.

"It matters not," went on the counsel for the defense, "in what manner I gained the knowledge I am about to impart to you. I will produce the evidence of its truth."

There was the absolute quietude of expectancy in the court-room.

"I propose to prove to you, gentlemen of the jury, that this James Barrett, this man of unblemished repute, this man of high place, was once guilty of one of the most despicable crimes of which—"

"I object! Your honor, I object!" This from the prosecuting attorney.

"Objections overruled," growled the magistrate.

The bare trace of the shadow of a smile touched the lips of John Hobart.

"I propose to prove to you that James Barrett, through the honeyed sweetness of his words a score of years ago, stole the wife of a young man, a malaria-stricken soldier in Cuba, gone to succor the weak, gone to fight for his country—"

His words trailed off, lost in the cry of another. A terrible figure had arisen from a front seat. The spectators stood aghast.

"I did it!" screamed John Hobart. "I killed James Barrett. I was the soldier in Cuba. I'm glad I killed him. God! I'm glad!"

Abruptly John Hobart slouched into his seat.





# The Log-Book

By the Editor

**H**AVE you ever taken the trouble to look about among your friends and acquaintances to note what qualities in them seem to make for the success or failure they have achieved in life? Do those who have reached the top appear very different in temperament and disposition from those who only just manage to keep the wolf from the door? Do they talk more or less? A friend of mine maintains that the man who says little is more likely to make his mark in the world than the one whose tongue is constantly wagging.

For my part, I have a theory that the refusal to be discouraged by failure is a big asset in arriving at success. There's F. W. Woolworth just dead, worth sixty-five millions. His first five-and-ten-cent store, opened in Utica on Washington's Birthday in 1879, was a failure; but, undismayed, young Woolworth proceeded to open another in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which won out. And there are countless other parallel instances, not only in trade, but in the professions as well.

In this connection I am reminded of a humorous remark by the well-known essayist, Richard Le Gallienne, who, on being queried as to the chances for success in authorship, said that only the poor writers refused to be discouraged.



The instant that he saw her, he knew her for the one woman for whom he had been waiting; but when, added to unvoiced and unbelievable suspicion, there came the certainty that she was forever unattainable, every atom of his manhood was needed to sustain the blow.

## "BULLY BESS"

BY KATHARINE EGGLESTON

Author of "Little Boss of Big Ben," "The Girl in Khaki," etc.

our five-part serial for next week, is a tale of sacrifice and of conflict of forces, crude and noble, unleashed for good or evil at the irresponsible hazard of chance. And at the very moment when there sounds the dull stroke of doom, there enters the finger of Fate, the sword of Destiny, the hand of a Providence, which in an eye-flash, as it were, re-makes the world for *Martin Van Horn* and *Bess Whately*.



There is nothing emotional about an engine, for instance, a machine may be soulless though perfect; but a man without a soul—what of him?

## "THE HIGHER STRAIN"

BY JOHN FREDERICK

Author of "The Hammer," etc.

our complete novelette for May 31, is an interestingly original answer to this problem. *Morgan Bantry* had achieved the very pinnacle of intellectual aloofness—he was a

Samurai, a superman, a cold and inflexible being of will without heart. So he would have trained *Strann*, the obscure; but, as in other like cases, the pupil outstripped the master. For an ending unique in fiction, this is positively breath-taking.

There remains now only a limited period within which stories about drunks can be considered to be up to date. Personally I never cared much for this type of yarn, but confess to having been quite carried away with "THE WANDERING STEW," by Roy-W. Hinds, which you will all have the opportunity of reading in next week's ARGOSY. It is by no means a burlesque on a serious subject, as so many tales of the sort are, but a veritable gem of its kind. In Norman Springer's "BETWEEN CRIBS" you will find drama against an unusual setting—the engine-room of a cargo-boat crossing the Indian Ocean; while a touching after-the-war episode is capitally set forth by Charles Tenney Jackson in "WHAT'S A FLAT FOOT BETWEEN FRIENDS?" In addition to the foregoing, Raymond S. Spears will be on hand with another of his Mississippi fantasies—"WINGS OF THE RIVER SPIRIT"; and other attractive features will fill out an exceptionally alluring number.

### INTENSIFIED SATISFACTION

Yellow Grass, Saskatchewan.

Last summer I started to read your *Railroad Man's Magazine*, and the first book made me buy the next, and so on until I thought I couldn't do without it, and was more satisfied when it changed to be a weekly magazine, and still more when *THE ARGOSY* and *Railroad Man's Magazine* came to be one. There are sure some good stories in it. Wishing you success in your business. One of your faithful readers,

ARTHUR PENNER.

### THE HEIGHT OF PERFECTION

Troy, Missouri.

I have read *THE ARGOSY* for about as many years as I can remember reading. I think it is the height of perfection in magazines, and always contains some of the best stories to be found in print in any magazine. I was unlucky enough to be in a small town this week, where I couldn't get my ARGOSY, so will have to send for same. If you should happen to Log this, please use my initials only.

C. J.

### A FAIRY TALE WINNER

Norton, Virginia.

I cannot praise *THE ARGOSY* enough. I think it is just grand. I borrowed a magazine, and the first instalment of "The Web" was in it. I have bought it at the news-stand ever since. I read the first two instalments of "The Listener," and could not get any of the others. I think "The Web," "Forbidden Trails," and "The Whistling Girl" are just fine. "After a Million Years" is, I think, more like a fairy-tale.

PEARL.

### PLEADING FOR THE ROUGH STUFF

Hammond, Indiana.

What has become of the good railroad stories that used to appear in the *Railroad Man's Magazine*—such stories as "Lem and I on the Ypres

War Run" and "Hiram on the High Seas"? Since *THE ARGOSY* and the *Railroad Man's Magazine* have combined there haven't been any railroad stories. Have been reading your magazine for some time, and the stories are all fine, but let's have more of the "rough stuff."

MRS. C. R. DETURLER.

### A TEXAN KEEN ON "TEXAS FEVER"

Waco, Texas.

Enclosed please find renewal of my subscription to *THE ARGOSY*. I sure could not afford to miss *THE ARGOSY*. I've just finished reading the first part of "Texas Fever," by Charles V. Barney, and think it is a crackerjack. I like most all of the authors, especially Seltzer, E. R. Burroughs Zane Grey, and some others. Who wouldn't? Seltzer's "Riddle Gawne," "Square Deal Sander-son," and "Slow Burgess" were great. I like Western and Northern stories.

VANDER ROYALS.

### "CLEAN AND WHOLESOME"

Augusta, Kansas.

Enclosed find renewal to my subscription to *THE ARGOSY*. As I have said before, *THE ARGOSY* is a grand book, and I cannot say enough in regard to it. It is so clean and wholesome, and the stories are all good. I really did like "Tessie of Rainbow Glen," and please, Mr. Editor, tell Mr. S. W. Hopkins to please let us hear from him again. I also liked "Troopers Unafraid." There is always somebody ready to criticise, and I say, if I don't like a story in *THE ARGOSY*, I pass it on, and they are so few I do not miss them. I am quite sure I do not expect *THE ARGOSY* to be published in my favor only, as some one else possibly has a different idea than I.

I wanted to take a few minutes of your time to tell you that I thought the "Peter the Brazen" and the "Cuthford—Soldier of the Sea" series are great, and I am always glad when C. A. Seltzer or Loring Brent or Achmed Abdullah are back in the ranks, and I am always ready for a good old



Western story. Tell G. W. Ogden to get busy; one gets tired of waiting for him. Well, here's luck, and I say keep up the good work and ignore the critics, and *THE ARGOSY* will be a wonderful success. Best wishes.

MAURINE BAKER.

### "CONTRABAND" IN ALL-STORY WEEKLY IN 1916—\$1.20

Midland Park, New Jersey.

I have just finished "Islands of Stone," and appreciate your kindness for giving me a change. You may give us all the Western tales you like, but give us a tale of the North, and I will rank it as good, and perhaps better, than the West. I know a great many Northern readers will stand by me on this point; so please, Mr. Editor, give us a tale of the North more frequently. Did you ever publish a serial entitled "Contraband," and how can I obtain it? Wishing *THE ARGOSY* leadership always,

C. J. R.

### ITS READERS ARE THE ARGOSY'S FIRST CARE

Detroit, Michigan.

Through the courtesy of a neighbor I have been reading a few back numbers of *THE ARGOSY*. Allow me to congratulate you upon the interesting stories. Am taking the magazine, starting with the March 1 number. The description of the three-day feast in the story, "The Hammer," is wonderful. Your magazine is not half full of advertisements. I have dropped two monthly magazines on that account—one I had taken for years. Pardon me for taking up your time. I feel I must tell you how delighted I am with *THE ARGOSY*, published weekly. I am proud to be one of your large and interesting family.

ELIZABETH H. DAY.

### THREE COPIES TO KEEP PEACE IN THE FAMILY

Lansing, Michigan.

*THE ARGOSY* has been in our home since I can remember. We are all fond of a good story, and *THE ARGOSY* is a whole bookful. We have to get three copies some weeks in order to keep peace in the family. *THE ARGOSY* reminds one of a rainbow. Such a splendid combination of stories, with the Log-Book for the pot of gold at the end. Have finished "The Web." It gives one a good idea of German efficiency. If the Kaiser had only been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* there wouldn't have been any war. His mind would have been too intent on better things. Long live *THE ARGOSY*.

G. W. BIRDMAN.

### WANTS A REVOLUTIONARY WAR STORY

Ramseur, North Carolina.

I am a great admirer of *THE ARGOSY*. Have been reading it ever since it was founded. I have several years' bound volumes, published in the '80's and '90's that I prize highly. I occasionally read a story in them. Brings back fond memories of my boyhood days. I do not want to be considered a kicker, but I do believe some other than

those foreign-scene stories will suit a majority of your readers best. I like stories where the scene is based on the founding of our country—stories in which the Indian is prominently displayed. Now that the Indian is very near extinct, people never tire of the exploits of the noble red men. Why not let us have a story scene based on that great hero and patriot, General Francis Marion, whose operations were in the Carolinas during the Revolutionary War?

J. D. HARDIN.

### THE NECESSITY OF BEING ON THE JOB

Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Enclosed find money order for sixty cents, for which please send me the back numbers of *THE ARGOSY* dated January 11, 18, 25, and February 1 and 8. Having been very ill for some seven weeks, the first thing I did on feeling normal was to send for *THE ARGOSY*, but finding I am being left out on some fine serials, I lay aside the later numbers until I catch up to them.

In reading the Log-Book I don't find many Wisconsin boosters, but there certainly seem to be some readers in Fond du Lac. If you're not right on the job at the news-stand when the magazine comes in, you're met with a polite, "Awfully sorry, but we just sold the last *ARGOSY*." I can't see why some people can kick on any of the stories. I think the editor knows his business, and his writers as well, when he gets out a magazine like *THE ARGOSY* every week. Please hurry along my numbers.

MRS. E. E. ANDREWS.

### HOW ABOUT THESE MISTAKES, OTHER WESTERN READERS?

Etna, Wyoming.

As I am renewing my subscription to *THE ARGOSY* I thought I would tell you how I like the magazine. A lot of good serials have been published in the last year, also a good many fine short stories. I like the *Cuthford* series, also the "Peter the Brazen" stories. The best story you have run lately, in my estimation, was "Forbidden Trails." In fact I like all the Western and northern stories. The improbable tales, like "In the Year 2000" and the one now running, "After a Million Years," I do not care for and seldom read, but others probably like them or you would not publish them.

The stories by Raymond Speares are fine. The one started in the February 22 issue, "Islands of Stone," starts out fine. There are a number of great mistakes in some of the Western and northern tales. Some of the authors probably never were west of Chicago. In conclusion would say, if you publish this letter, please sign my initials only.

E. L.

### A NEW ONE BY THE SPEARSES TO COME

Northboro, Massachusetts.

At last you have exceeded all our hopes. "Islands of Stone" is absolutely the best tale you have given us in all the eight and one-half years we have been reading *THE ARGOSY*. "The Trap-Line Runners" is a very close second, however,



Spears never yet wrote a poor story. Other good stories I remember offhand are "A Soldier's Honor," "Vicky Van," "Americans After All," "Rosalind and the Forty Thieves," "Breaking Into West Point," and all of C. A. Seltzer's, Zane Grey's, H. Bedford-Jones's, and Fred Jackson's stories.

I remember some time since in the Log-Book considerable discussion over Jackson, but, like Spears, he never wrote a poor story. At least, I have never read one, and I have read about all he has written. Long life to THE ARGOSY, long may it prosper, and may you give us some more by the same combination that wrote "Islands of Stone."

B. E. THAYER.

## AN ENTHUSIASTIC NEW READER

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY since "Forbidden Trails" and "After a Million Years" began. I think these stories were great. I like THE ARGOSY the best of all magazines, and I can hardly wait till Thursday comes to get the next issue. I like the serials best, and then the novelettes. The short stories are also very interesting, but not long enough for me. However, I have no kick coming, and read the book through from cover to cover.

In the March 8 issue of THE ARGOSY you had two complete novelettes. They were great. I wish you could publish two every week, but I know this would be asking too much. Some people might like a couple of short stories rather than a novelette. I am now reading "The Hammer" and "Texas Fever," which are very good. I have heard of the story by G. W. Ogden, "The Listener." When are we going to get another story by him? I also like Charles Alden Seltzer. I have seen his "Riddle Gawne" in pictures, but I have not read it.

You may publish any or all of this letter in your Log-Book. Wishing THE ARGOSY the best of luck, and hoping that they will be as good forever as they are now, I remain, a loyal reader,

LOUIS A. SCHAEFER.

## "CITADEL OF FEAR" NOT IN BOOK FORM

Washington, District of Columbia.

I have just read Mr. Harris's letter in regard to historical stories, and note his suggestion that you reprint some of the old standard novels. I beg to ask that you will not do this. All of us who are readers have read these stories time and time again, and if we wish to read them again, they are on the shelves of every public library in the land. What we want is new fiction, not reprints.

Personally, I do not care much for historical novels, nor for continued stories, as I am a very rapid reader, and it is so exasperating just to get a taste of a story, and then have to wait for the rest of it. I like novelettes and short stories; the long stories I like best to read in book form. I never lay a magazine down till I have finished it; can easily do it in one evening.

Of course, I realize that you have to cater to different tastes, and I think your magazine is fine. Can I get the "Citadel of Fear" in book

form? One of the magazines with that story that I bought had some missing pages, and I never got a satisfactory reading of it. I love stories of mystery, detective stories, and really good love stories; and a good short story is hard to beat.

W. D. C.

## "HAS THEM ALL BEAT IN A FAIR RACE"

Talent, Oregon.

I have never seen any letter in the Log-Book from this part of the country, so will write and say that there are readers of THE ARGOSY here just the same. I get THE ARGOSY every week, and three of my neighbors read them when I am through with them. If it only came twice a week instead of once! I am a swift reader, and get over them in a hurry. I surely like the Western stories, and "Little Boss of Big Ben," "The Listener," "Square Deal Sanderson," and "Forbidden Trails" are certainly the best ever. "Sunnie of Timberline" and "The Will and the Woman" were good, too. I enjoy the short stories, especially if they are cowboy stories, like the *Uncle Jake* tales. Had many a good laugh out of "The Million Dollar Belt." Take it all in all, THE ARGOSY has them all beat in a fair race. I have no kick whatsoever. Keep up the good work. Here's luck.

BEN WYMAN.

## NO THOUGHT OF CHANGING THE ARGOSY BACKWARD

1426 Wesley Avenue,  
Columbus, Ohio.

I received your letter this P.M., and wish to thank you for your prompt attention. I am receiving THE ARGOSY all right now, and have also got all of my back numbers; but you have no idea how long it seemed from December 7 to January 11; it was like a year with no ARGOSY. I simply cannot do without it, and it seems to grow better all the time.

Have just finished "Square Deal Sanderson." It's a fine Western story. I think "Broadname Whispers" very good indeed; also "Deep Water." Yes, I like the short stories, too; only the darky stories, I don't care much for them; but others do, so I don't mind. I like detective stories and Western stories best of all; but as long as THE ARGOSY remains as good as it is at present, you can count on me as a lifetime subscriber.

I did feel a little worried when you announced the *Railroad Man's Magazine* was to be combined with our much-loved ARGOSY, but I am pleased to say that I do not see but what it is all right, thus far anyway, and I do hope it will continue to be.

I like the Log-Book very much. It seems almost like getting letters from old friends to read them. I don't know why, but it seems as if all ARGOSY readers ought to be friends. "The Whistling Girl" bids fair for a good one, also "Forbidden Trails." There seems to be several serials lately that don't quite reach my idea of ARGOSY standard; but oh, I am very glad it comes every week. Please don't consider those who want it semi-monthly. It is too good as it is to be changed backward. Long live the weekly ARGOSY!

(Mrs.) EMMIE R. HIGBY.





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